THE BOY WITH AN IDEA

MRS. EILOART

The Knickerbocker Series

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THE

BOY WITH AN IDEA

BY

MRS. EILOART

AUTHOR OF "THE BOYS OF BEECHWOOD," "TOM DUSTAN'S TROUBLES," ETC.

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THE BOY WITH AN IDEA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES THE READER TO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN WITH A SINGULARLY GOOD OPINION OF HIMSELF.

I SHOULD have liked you to have known him! He was a nice boy, very! You would have said so if you had had the pleasure of his acquaintance, particularly if you were of a quiet turn of mind, liked everything to go on in regular jog-trot style, hated new notions, and detested being disturbed in your old-fashioned ways and ideas; for, whatever your own opinion on any particular subject might be, and whatever grounds you might have for believing it as a correct one, and based on as sound and satisfactory reasons as any opinion could possibly be, he would very coolly attempt to confute it with some crotchet of his own, holding forth some newfangled way of doing a thing that every one knew had been done in quite a different manner for perhaps a hundred years past, letting you see plainly

that he thought no method could be so good as his own looking all the time as wise as if he were Solomon himself, and I really believe thinking himself a great deal wiser; and, whatever the subject might be, generally opening his own views upon it with a pet expression of his, "I've got an idea!"

His name was John Ashdell. John!—it's a good, solid, steady-sounding old English name. You would not expect it to belong to a lad who was full of the flightiest, wildest, most out-of-the-way notions that ever entered the head of a boy, or man either. John!—every letter seems full of common sense, and thorough-going, straightforward practical ways; but there was not much common sense about John; indeed, I think he would have rather disdained such an ordinary, every-day quality; and, as to anything practical, if once you had attempted to carry one of John's ideas into execution, you would have known better than to have expected anything of the sort from him. But I don't want you to think that he was a bad boy, or an idle one either; and certainly he had no want of brains. He was thoroughly kind-hearted and good-tempered, and, so far from being lazy, if he had taken half the pains to do things in the ordinary ways that were good enough for other people, that he did to try and do them in some newfangled manner of his own, he would have accomplished more work than half the boys of his age; while as to abilities, he had plenty of them, almost too many, only he never seemed to know how to put them to a good use, letting his imagination run

away with him, in fact, and lead him to do all sorts of absurd and ridiculous things, just because he considered he was much too clever to do anything like anybody else.

I am afraid John's mother spoiled him, as mothers do spoil their boys at times, especially when they've only one, and he is bright and clever, and nice-looking, and very like his father, dead and gone years past; and John was all this, so perhaps it is not much to be wondered at if Mrs. Ashdell let him have his own way, and follow out his own ideas, a great deal more than was desirable either for herself or for him. She was not the only one who spoiled him though; his grandmother was always ready to help whenever she had an opportunity; and, though Master John's whims had given them both so much trouble, he had such a wonderful flow of words, such astonishing boldness of conception, and such promptitude in carrying out his schemes, that I really think they both believed him to be the cleverest boy in the world.

John and his mother resided in a pretty village about ten miles from London. Mrs. Ashdell's cottage was one of a few nice, cosy little places, just large enough for comfort, and not large enough for show, with climbing plants over their porches and verandas, and bright, trim flower-gardens before them, that faced the highroad to London. The cosiest and brightest of all, was Mrs. Ashdell's. She was very fond of flowers, and even in spite of all John's "ideas" on the subject, reared some very beautiful ones. How she would have succeeded, if it had not been for old

Tillsen the gardener's great persistence in turning a deaf ear to all John's theories about horticulture, is doubtful, for he certainly had very peculiar notions of his own on the subject; but Tillsen never heeded them. He had been the gardener-in-chief to all the better-class houses, whose owners did not keep gardeners of their own, for years past, and was quite in the right in considering he knew his own business a great deal too well for John to teach it to him John's grandmother lived about half-a-mile off, and, whenever he could find nobody else to listen to the details of his last new scheme, he would run off to her; for the old lady's belief in him was unbounded, and her patience with his failures untiring. She took his part stoutly against Uncle George, who by no means thought John so great a genius as he was in his own eyes, and who seldom missed an opportunity of telling him as much.

Uncle George lived in a pleasant, roomy house at the end of the village, with his wife and half-a-dozen children. He was a builder, carpenter, etc., and very comfortably off, with a thriving business, which gave him plenty to do. There was a nice, bright, well-kept bit of flower-garden before his house, a large piece for vegetables at the back, and beyond, a small orchard. On one side of the house was a paddock, where the two horses required in the business grazed in company with the one cow that supplied the family with milk and butter, and on the other was the building-yard with a large work-shed at one side of it, where, when Uncle George was not in the way to superin-

tend matters, his place was supplied by his head man, Timothy Gibson, or, as he was sometimes called—half in fun perhaps, because of a certain failing of his which caused him to be at times by no means a reliable person—"Trusty Tim." Trusty Tim was a good-natured, hard-working fellow, and had long been his master's right hand and factotum, but, unhappily, he had a weakness for strong ale, which at times overcame him, and caused him to forget the discretion which, generally speaking, was his predominant characteristic. John was rather partial to Trusty Tim. He would drop into the shed, and if Tim had time to listen, or was occupied by a job that allowed him to give some of his attention to him, he would be delighted to hear John unfold some of his "ideas" upon things in general, and carpentering and building in particular. I don't know whether he was ever led away sufficiently by his veneration for John to carry out any of his notions; at any rate he never did so with his master's materials; but his faith in the boy was almost as great as his grandmother's.

Uncle George's children had a fine time of it, as healthy, hearty, country children mostly have. They ran about in the timber-yard and the paddock, picked up apples in the orchard, went nutting and blackberrying in due season, rode the horses without saddles, and joked with Trusty Tim, who made them toys out of odd bits of wood, put up wonderful swings for them, and told them tales of the time when he was a youngster himself. But they liked best being with Cousin John. He was thoroughly good-

natured, especially with children, and, when they were all tired of play, would amuse them for hours by telling them of the extraordinary things he intended doing when he was a man, or how much better everything in this world would be if people would only follow out his notions, and arrange matters accordingly. They were too young to help him carry out his projects, for John was fourteen, and his eldest cousin full three years younger, while the family group terminated in a baby in arms. If John could have had his own way, he would have made experiments with this baby, and he actually went to the length of proposing some to Lucy, the nurse, a good-tempered buxom girl, who, according to him, had no more notion of handling an infant than anybody else. To hear John talk, you would have wondered how ever babies had been reared at all. He would have it that people were as ignorant of the art of nursing as of everything else. Lucy used to listen and laugh, and cry, "Lor, Master John!" when he said anything particularly outrageous, but she held her baby tight, and took good care never to let John get hold of it for an instant, for fear he should make some experiment upon it. It was just the same with his aunt's cook—his mother's old servant was a great deal too obstinate and self-willed, according to John, ever to listen to reason, but his aunt's Hannah was a person of an easier disposition; fat, round, pleasant, and good-tempered; and John liked above all things to expound to her how apple-dumplings should be made, and meat should be roasted; and, though Hannah

had never as yet let him carry out any of his theories, John considered he had some reason to hope that in time she would feel how much wiser he was in culinary matters than all the cookery-books that ever were written, from "the way to cook apples" to "Francatelli's Guide."

It was just the same with everything else. There was not a blacksmith, according to John, that knew how to shoe a horse properly; and his favorite lounge out of school-hours was the forge in the village, where he would find fault with everything that was going on, and be perpetually offering his assistance and advice to have matters carried on better. Reade, the blacksmith, was a solid, grave fellow, but he bore pretty well with the boy, for John was so thoroughly well meaning, and so perfectly convinced that he was doing every one the greatest kindness possible in favoring them with his "ideas," that it was not very easy to be angry with him. Besides, dry and sober as Reade seemed, he liked a joke, and John could always put up with one at his own expense, even when, in apparently permitting him to carry out his schemes, it took rather a practical form. Reade would often pause between the sounds of his anvil to listen to the boy's chatter, and a curious twinkle would come into his deep black eyes, and something as near like a smile as any one ever saw, flicker across his thin dark face. There were plenty of others to whom John was very fond of chattering and opening his mind, and altogether, with all his whims and vagaries, he was tolerably popular in the village, there

being only one person in it unkind enough, according to his mother, and ridiculous enough, according to John, to say in plain, outspoken words, that the boy's head was "being turned with conceit, and that he wanted sending to a good strict boarding-school to have the nonsense taken out of him."

And this person was John's Uncle George, who had no patience whatever with his nephew's crochets, and, as I said before, lost no opportunity of ridiculing both them and him. However, this did not trouble John very much He was supremely happy in the conviction that he was one of the cleverest fellows in existence, and was endeavoring to impress everybody about him with the same conviction, benevolently favoring them with his advice on whatever subject might arise; always with the most unbounded confidence, and the most implicit belief in himself and his own powers, dashing into the conversation with all sorts of pet theories and wild fancies of his own, and opening them all with his perpetual expression, "I've got an idea!"

I mean to tell you about some of his "ideas," and what they led him into.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW WAY OF BRINGING PIGS HOME FROM MARKET.

UNCLE GEORGE was in the habit of fattening his own pigs ; and a very good habit, too, as every one knows, if you want your pork and bacon to be of really first-rate quality. He generally bought them young, and after a while handed them over to the care of Trusty Tim, who, by a judicious diet of toppings, barley-meal, and potatoes, generally succeeded in turning out pigs that would have been considered quite worthy of a place in any cattle-show. For Trusty Tim did a good deal about the place that by no means came under the head of his duties as foreman in the building-yard. If it had not been for that one failing of his to which I have alluded, he would have been invaluable to his master, and, as it was, in many matters he was Uncle George's right hand. One of his numerous employments, which required both skill and honesty, was to select and purchase the pigs for fattening at Old Cross Market.

He was about to start one morning on this very errand having, besides, to execute some commissions for his mas-

ter in the town, and Uncle George was giving him his final directions, when John stepped into the building-yard, and heard what errand Tim was being dispatched upon: "You may buy a store-pig, fit to put up at once, Tim, in place of the one we're going to kill next week; or if you should see a sow with a thriving litter of young ones, I wouldn't mind that instead. I've had some thought of raising my own, but be sure the sow is young, and of a good sort, and the litter likely to fatten well."

"All right, Uncle!" cried John, who was always in too great a hurry to speak himself to let any one else finish what they had to say; "only let me go with Tim, and I'll take care he don't make any blunders as to what sort of pigs he brings. Tim's all very well, but I don't think he knows the points of a pig. You should go more by the mouth, I say, just as you do in a horse. Just see what sort of teeth he has; that'll tell you if he'll eat well; and the shape of his mouth's a very good sign as to whether he'll grow fat upon it. That's my idea, so I wish you'd let me go with Tim. It's a holiday at school to-day—master's birthday—and I'll take care Tim brings you home as good a pig as ever you set eyes on."

"You'll teach Tim how to choose a pig, will you?" said Uncle George, dryly; "anything else, young man? I should like to know what there is you couldn't do better than anybody besides. Now, don't you think you could preach a better sermon than the parson?"

"Well, I've got an idea that I could," replied John,

coolly. "I don't think his are first-rate, by any means. I only wish he'd let me get into the pulpit and try."

"Anything else, Master Modest?" said Uncle George "Well, it's useless to stand talking here. Tim, my man, there's the money, and don't go near the 'Blue Boar,' nor any other place of the sort; or, if you do, just stop at the first pint, you understand, if you want to bring the pigs home safely."

"Oh, let me go with him, Uncle George," pleaded John, "and I'll answer for it the pigs will come home all right then."

"Let the boy go, master," urged Tim; "he's capital company on the road."

Thus urged, Uncle George consented, laying strict injunctions upon Tim not to trust John with the reins, for fear he should carry out any newfangled notions about driving, and not to be guided by any of his ideas in buying the pigs. Tim promised faithfully to bear these injunctions in mind, and then John and he started off together.

It was a lovely November morning. The mist that, earlier, had hung around, cleared off, and the sun was shining brightly on the red and yellow leaves that strewed the ground, and those that with a faded greenness still bedecked the trees. Old Cross was four miles off, and the road to it lay through pleasant lanes, with here and there a tiny hamlet by the side, or a substantial farmhouse, looking so solidly comfortable, and homelike, and homely, as nothing but a well-kept English farmhouse can. Sometimes

the trees met overhead; and then a leaf would come slowly flickering down into the cart, and John would stop in the midst of his chatter to admire the beauty of its autumnal coloring. Then they would pass a group of children going to school, some of the boldest of whom would try to outrun the cart, and John would pelt them with chestnuts, or set them scrambling for a rosy apple, and then begin telling Tim how children should be taught if he had his way, and the present generation of schoolmasters and schoomistresses be sent about their business, or made to go to school themselves to learn their trade properly. Tim was a capital listener; it was no wonder John was so fond of his company; but for all that he would not allow John to take the reins, remembering his master's orders, and having a dim idea of his own that though Master John was a very fine fellow, he was much too clever at talking to be very clever at anything else.

They were some time in reaching Old Cross, for Tim had frequently to turn off the direct road to leave a message for his master, and once had to stop to execute a little job for him—which was mending a gate at one of the farmhouses, during which John of course could not be content with minding the horse, but must be giving Tim his advice the whole of the time. All this caused them not to reach Old Cross till eleven o'clock, when the market was full, and intending purchasers were busy surveying the stock. Tim put up his horse at the "Red Lion," saying, "Master told me to keep clear of the 'Blue

Boar,' and their ale is rather thick, and gets to the head uncommon quick; but that's no reason I shouldn't have a quiet pint here, for I'm terribly thirsty with the drive, and shall be able to talk all the better if I moisten my throat, and some of those farmers want a deal of persuading before they can be brought to see things in a right light, and let you have an animal at a proper price."

John did not care for ale, but he went to a stall in the market and solaced himself with some brandysnaps and gingerbread nuts, having first given Tim the money to procure some ale, thinking it the least he could do to evince his sense of Tim's good fellowship on their road to Old Cross. Then he strolled about the market, and gave one or two of the old women who had fowls to sell his "ideas" as to the best mode of fattening them; I think the diet he recommended was cod-liver oil and arrowroot, which he assured the good ladies they would find, if they thoroughly followed it out, would make their fowls grow to the size of turkeys, instead of being the poor little things they were. Then he looked about for a pig, and presently pointed out a lean, long-nosed creature, with legs that all the barley-meal in the world would never have made into respectable hams, and said to Tim—

"That's your sort. Look at her. She's the one to fatten. Got a litter with her, too, just like the mother. Now, Tom, if you'll take my advice, you'll buy her at any price. I've examined her mouth, and the way she'll eat would astonish you. Why she'll lay on fat like fun, once

you give her the right sort of stuff to do it with; so will the young ones. Now you see if they don't."

"Never saw any of that sort that did," replied Tim, gravely. "No, no, Master John, I daren't take *her* home in the cart. It wants another sort to please the master, there's the one I have in my mind's eye, but my throat'll be as dry as dust on a July day before I get her at the price I mean to give. He's a tight hand at a bargain, her master."

Tim walked off in the direction of the pig he coveted, and John sauntered about the market. Presently he saw a boy about thirteen, with an open merry face and fair wavy hair, standing at a stall where hot sausages were sold fresh from the frying-pan. He was devouring these dainties with an astonishing relish; they were hot, savory, and well-seasoned, and it evidently mattered very little to him of what they might be composed.

"What a bit of luck," thought John, "here's Bob tucking into the sausages like winkey. I'll go and have some, too, and ask him how he came here."

Bob was quite as much pleased to see John as John was to see him. They were cousins, and both equally related to Uncle George. Bob gave John, in the interval of sausage-eating, the required information as to how and why he was in the market-place. He had walked over from St Roland's, six miles off, where he lived, and expected to find Tim in the market, who was to take him to Uncle George's, it having been settled that he was to stay there for a short time.

"For I've a bad cold, John, and mother thinks it's the overwork at school that's done it—though I don't know myself but what trying who could hop longest in the playground, without either shoes or stockings, has had something to do with it—so she thought a little change would do me good, and set me up for the winter. It's a jolly go, meeting you here, and Uncle George's isn't a bad place to be at; you and I will have a lark or two before I go back. We'll coax old Tim to let us take it in turns to drive home, and I've got a pea-shooter for the one that isn't driving."

"Ah, that won't do," replied John mournfully; "Tim's a good soul, but Uncle George has always got some ridiculous notion or other about me, and now he's taken it into his head that I can't drive, and charged Tim not to let me have the reins, and I did want to teach him a new way I'd got of holding in a horse. Never mind, if we've luck, perhaps Tim will let us, for to-day he is extra good-natured. Let's hope he will. I say, here he comes with his pigs—eight young ones, I declare. Well, that's not the sort I should have bought, but I suppose Tim knows what will please Uncle George."

Tim had had, as he anticipated, much difficulty in getting the pigs at his price: in fact the miller and he could not come to any terms at all till they had gone to the bar of the "Red Lion," where a great deal of the strongest ale dispensed there, helped them to come to a settlement. In consequence of this, Tim was in a fair way to realize John's wishes, for he was unfortunately nearly tipsy, and, having a

dim consciousness of the fact, he assumed an additional gravity and dignity of demeanor, in the vain hope of hiding from John's eyes his real condition.

"It's all right," John whispered to Bob with a chuckle; "he can't drive long, and if he should only take a little more, we might do as we liked with the horse or the pigs either. We'll get him to drive round by Brierley Common."

Now Brierley Common was by no means the nearest way to Uncle George's house at Shedley, but there was a cozy little place there, kept by a pleasant, good-tempered widow, who sold capital ale and cider, and for whom it was suspected Tim had something more than a friendly feeling At any rate he was always ready, whenever his business led him in that direction, to stop and have a pint of ale at "The Chequers," and the boys, when they were in the cart, had no great difficulty in persuading him to return home that way. They had rather a squeeze of it, for of course the sow and her litter had to be made room for, and the cart was not a large one; and, besides, they had two sacks of potatoes to carry as well; so with pigs, potatoes, the two boys, and Tim, there was as much as the cart would hold; still they found room for all, and started off, John in high spirits at the thought that, after passing Brierley Common, he should be able to get the reins in his own hands, and show his cousin some of his "ideas" about driving.

Mrs. Dale stood at her door as they drove up to "The Chequers," and accosted them with a pleasant smile and

friendly "Good-day;" Tim, of course, could not be less civil to her; then he alighted, and took a glass, perhaps two; at any rate he was quite long enough inside "The Chequers" to do so, while John was telling Bob how, if once he got the reins, he would give the horse his head in fine style, and set him galloping like a wild Arab of the desert. But though Tim, when he emerged from Mrs. Dale's residence, was very far from being as sober as a judge, he still remembered his promise to his master, and kept tight hold of the reins, even while drowsily nodding in his seat to such an extent that Bob began to feel afraid he would fall off. At last the ale he had drank proved itself too much for Tim, his head sunk heavily on his breast, and he began to snore audibly.

"Whatever shall we do with him?" said Bob; "do you think we can lay him at the bottom of the cart, Jack? He isn't safe here; he'll topple over."

"Let's get the reins out of his hands first, and then we'll see about making him comfortable," replied John. "We must put him to bed with the pigs and potatoes. He'll do very well down at the bottom of the cart, but I must have the reins."

But Tim was faithful to his trust; he held the reins tightly, and only murmured forth, as he grasped them more closely, "Master said I was to be sure and drive myself, so I durstn't trust thee, Master John." Then he began snoring again, louder than ever.

"Here's a pretty fix!" cried John. "He can't drive

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himself, and won't let me. Whatever time shall we get home at this rate?"

Bob stuck his hands in his pockets, and contemplated the sleeping Tim, saying, "He's sure to fall off if we let him sleep there."

And so Tim did, but luckily only backwards, dropping right at the bottom of the cart, where the sow made him anything but welcome, while the little pigs began munching the reins.

"Oh, this'll never do!" cried Bob. "Those creatures will eat him next; but how ever shall we get him on the seat again! I declare if that old sow isn't poking her snout at him. She means to take a bite or two. Let him alone, you brute!"

John looked thoughtfully at Tim and the pigs. "There isn't room enough for all, unless we could take the sow in the front seat with us, which I don't think we could. I'm sure she wants to nibble at him. But, Bob, I've got an idea! Why *should* that great fat beast be carried, any more than Shock, who's content to run after the cart, let it go as fast as it will. Let's tie her underneath by the neck, and turn the little ones out, they'll be safe to follow their mother, and we shall all get home famously, for the horse won't have such a load to carry, and poor old Tim can have the cart to himself, and the potatoes."

"Do you think we can fasten her underneath?" said Bob, doubtfully, "and, when we have fastened her, will she walk?"

"Safe to," replied John; "why, what a piece of nonsense it is to be carrying a great lazy animal in a cart when she has four stout legs of her own to walk upon. Now, old lady, turn out. Let's have your necktie, Bob; no, it isn't long enough, we must take the cord from the potatoes; there you are, join them together, and there's plenty of rope for my lady. Now we've got to get her out."

They lowered the tail-board of the cart, and with some difficulty succeeded in hauling out the sow. She did not like it at all, and grunted sorely at such treatment; but they tied her under the cart, much in the manner that dogs are sometimes secured, and then turned out the little pigs, by which time Bob found, to his great satisfaction, that Tim had dropped hold of the reins.

"We'll make him comfortable before we start," said he, and so they did, as far as the very limited space at the bottom of the cart would allow; then John took the reins, and proceeded to show Bob his new way of driving.

"The first thing is to make him hold his head up," said he, drawing the snaffle so tight that the poor horse felt his neck almost dislocated, and naturally began to rebel, struggling and kicking in hope of being free. "Ah! she isn't used to it; wait a bit, she'll soon find the benefit of it." But the horse didn't find the benefit of it, for he struggled and kicked still more, and by so doing greatly incommoded the sow, who, finding herself annoyed by the horse's legs, naturally retaliated by taking a bite at them. This scared

poor Wheeler more than ever; away he started, dragging cart and pig at his heels at a terrific rate. Bob was thoroughly frightened, but John was in all his glory. "Didn't I tell you I'd make him go off like a wild horse of the desert!" he cried. "Did you ever know old Wheeler start off in this style before?"

However, Wheeler had tugged at the reins to such good purpose that he got his head comparatively free, and, being a horse of a quiet disposition, once more proceeded at a gentle pace, Bob imploring John not to draw the reins so tightly again; "for if *he* goes like a wild Arab, the sow can't."

"Why shouldn't she?" replied John. "Pigs can run fast enough when they please, only people let them give way to their laziness, and never think of putting them to any other use than just to make pork and bacon out of them."

"Well, whatever else should they do with them?" asked Bob.

"*I* don't see why they shouldn't draw dogs'-meat carts, and children's chaises," said John, "I'm sure they're strong enough. Let them work for their living, I say, and not think they come into the world just to eat and grow fat, and then be sold by the butcher; they may as well be turned to account while they're waiting for that; at any rate I shall make this old lady and her young ones gallop as fast as Wheeler. Now, old fellow, hold up your head, and off we go."

Away Wheeler started, and the poor sow under the

cart, finding herself forced to run too, grunted and panted, but still got over the ground faster than she had ever done in her life before. The little pigs kept up with their mother, squeaking awfully the while, and making their poor little legs ache with the unwonted pace. John exulted loudly, "Isn't it stunning! Didn't I tell you the old lady could run, and the young ones too, if they were only taught they must. And look at old Wheeler. Isn't he clearing the ground in style! That's my new way of holding him in! People don't half know how to drive."

Presently they came to a little hamlet by the roadside, the children in which, having dined, were returning to school. Of course, the sight of a horse at full gallop with a sow tied under the cart running as fast as the horse, and a swarm of little pigs trotting after her, was too great a treat to these youngsters for them not to see as much as they could of it, instead of making haste to their lessons. Away they ran, too, shouting, hurrahing, flinging their caps in the air, and throwing stones at the pigs to make them run faster. John took this as a small ovation, a tribute to his skill in driving, and in teaching pigs the way they should go; while Bob, thoroughly frightened, expecting every instant the cart would be upset, kept imploring John not to urge Wheeler on so fast, but to be content with arriving home in a quieter manner.

"That'll never do," replied John; "I must conquer him now I've begun, or he'll think he's conquered me. Don't the old lady below keep it up well! and the young ones

are going it in style. No, it won't do, Wheeler," he added as the horse attempted to slacken his pace, and carry his head a little more as Nature meant he should; "on you go, and up you keep your head." He gave Wheeler a lash with the whip as he spoke, and pulled more tightly at the reins. John was anything but a cruel boy; still he had his theory to enforce, and if Wheeler could not be brought to go, by any other means, in the way John thought it right he should, why the whip must be resorted to. But Wheeler did not approve of the lash, nor of having his head pulled in so tightly. He pranced and kicked, and the poor sow received one of his heels full on her nose. She gave him in return so sharp a bite that poor Wheeler, thoroughly furious, ran on, and instead of turning the corner as he should have done, kept straight forward, and let John pull as he might, never desisted running till he found himself in the middle of a tall quick-set hedge, where he was obliged perforce to come to a standstill, greatly to the comfort of the unfortunate sow, who was able to take breath at last, while her little ones gathered round her, telling their mamma most pathetically how tired they were with trying to keep up with her. As to the school-children, of course they were highly delighted with Wheeler's predicament, and clapped their hands, and expressed their approval as loudly as if he had run into the hedge on purpose to please them.

"Here's a pretty go!" said Bob, ruefully; "what's to be done now?"

"Get Wheeler out of this, and he'll go on right enough," replied John. "I only wish those little monkeys wouldn't stand there making such a dreadful noise."

Bob and he got down and endeavored to extricate Wheeler from the hedge. It was a work of difficulty, and they tore their hands and clothes in doing so, but at last they succeeded, and were about to get into the cart again, when a loud shout from the children informed them that the sow had released herself from her very unpleasant position, and was making her escape as fast as she could, followed by all her little ones. Away darted the school-children after her. Who *could* be expected to think about lessons with such a chase before them? Bob and John ran off; it would never do for Uncle George to lose his pigs like this; and Wheeler, finding himself left to his own resources, thought the best thing he could do would be to go quietly home in his own old-fashioned way, instead of being driven after John's new one. Away he started, and it was not long before Uncle George was surprised to see old Wheeler trotting into the yard without, apparently, any one in the cart behind him. Wheeler was the steadiest horse in the village, the very last to be suspected of such an impropriety as running away; but coming home like this without either Tim or the boys, looked very much like it, and then, where were the pigs?

Uncle George got up and looked in the cart, expecting to find the pigs there, but instead, he saw Tim with his head on a sack of potatoes, snoring heavily. He shook

him, and Tim grunted out, "Dont'ee, dont'ee, Master John; master said I wasn't to let 'ee have the reins."

"Where's the pigs?" asked Uncle George, "and where's John and Bob?"

"All right, all right, Mrs. Dale," said Tim, sleepily; "one of the master's own sort, as tidy a beast as ever brought up a litter."

"Mrs. Dale! then he's been at 'The Chequers,'" said Uncle George, "and I suppose I must go there to look after the pigs. I hope Master John won't be trying any of his new 'ideas' upon them."

He called a couple of his men, and they took Tim and the potatoes out of the cart, laying the former down in the work-shed to sleep himself sober, while Uncle George got into the cart and drove off in the direction of "The Chequers," hoping there to find his pigs, and to learn how it was Tim had come home in the cart by himself. He had not driven above a mile when he heard a perfect Babel of children's voices proceeding from a field separated from the road by a high hedge.

"I've got this fellow by the tail. Run round this way, Tom, and catch the old sow! Hold her head! Pull her legs! Give her a knock! Get on her back! I'm on!"

And looking over the hedge, Uncle George saw twenty urchins, with John and Bob foremost among them, trying to chase half as many pigs, while one red-headed little fellow had actually leaped on the back of the sow, and was doing all he could to impede her further progress, by

pulling her head by the ears. It was a fortunate thing that the sow rushed into a field, the gate of which was open, and that Bob (John would never thought of such a simply practical thing) had closed the gate when the children had all run in after her, otherwise the chase might have continued until nightfall; and, as it was, it was a matter of no slight difficulty to catch so many pigs. Shock was doing his best to help, barking furiously, taking flying bites first at one and then at the other, but as soon as a pig was caught it only struggled away out of its captor's arms, and the hunt had to begin over again. However, Bob and John having secured the sow, began to consider where they should place her while they captured the others, but were not left long in doubt, Uncle George's voice sounding over the hedge, "Tie her round the neck by this rope, and lead her here; I've got the cart outside. Now, you youngsters," he added, addressing the village children, "a penny for every pig you bring. Look sharp, and see who'll catch them quickest."

This was putting the thing in a business-like way, and the children, who had only chased the pigs in fun before, now began to do so in real earnest. Bob and John soon had the sow in the cart, and then set to work, too, to help catch the little pigs, which were soon all with their mother, grunting peacefully in the cart by her side, while the school-children departed in high glee to spend the pennies which they had won by capturing the pigs.

"And now, young man," said Uncle George, address-

ing John, when they were all together in the cart, "can you tell me how it was Wheeler came home without you, and the pigs were all loose in the field?"

John looked rather awkward, but he was a boy who had never told an untruth in his life, and after a little hesitation, he frankly told Uncle George the whole state of the case, passing over Tim's visit to "The Chequers" as lightly as he could. Uncle George was too well pleased at having all his pigs in safety to find much fault; besides, he knew that Tim would, as he said, "be ashamed enough of himself when he was sober." "I think next time, however," he added, "I'll send Wheeler to market by himself. He seems more fit to be trusted than either Tim or you, or both put together. But then you see, John, he is but a brute, and isn't blessed like you with a plentiful stock of 'ideas.'"

CHAPTER III.

HOW TO MAKE OLD BOOTS BETTER THAN NEW. SHOWING, TOO, THAT IT IS NOT SO EASY TO STAND ON ONE'S DIGNITY WHEN ONE HAS LITTLE BESIDES TO STAND ON.

BOB got on pretty well at Uncle George's. He was very fond of his little cousins, very obedient to his aunt, and seldom got into any mischief unless John was with him to show him the way. His cold, too, got better; and, when his father came to Shedley, he was so pleased with the improvement in him, that he was easily persuaded to let him remain there for the whole of the Christmas holidays. This arrangement was a very good one, as it left Bob's father and mother at liberty to pay a long-talked-of Christmas visit to some relatives in Cumberland; and, as they were elderly people, Bob would certainly not have enjoyed himself half so much among them as he would be sure to do amongst Uncle George's houseful of children, to say nothing of the society of his cousin John. Very soon, too, John and he had a third friend, in the person of another boy who was at home for the Christmas holidays. This young gentleman was about fourteen, a pupil at one of the

largest London schools, to which he went up every day by rail. He was a clever boy—slight, tall, and with thin, delicate features, and fair hair. He had carried off several prizes at each school-examination, and had as firm a faith in the South Middlesex University as John had in any of his "ideas." He had never expressed it in as many words, but you could easily gather that, in Master Theodore Harley's opinion, the South Middlesex University was the first school in the world, and he the first boy in it. John and Bob, however, were not disposed to quarrel with him on that account. One was too full of his own "ideas" to care very much for such matter-of-course things as his lessons; while the other, though a clever boy in his way, liked anything better than school. Theodore, or Ted, as his intimates called him, gave himself a few airs—was apt to judge people and things by his school standard—"what our masters would say of them," or what "our fellows would do;" but this did not hinder his being a thoroughly pleasant companion, and a very good-hearted fellow. Ted's parents—I think I may consider myself one of Ted's intimates, so I will give him his short name—resided a little distance from Uncle George's. They were elderly people, Ted being the youngest of a large family, all of whom, but himself, had either died in infancy, or were married and settled elsewhere; consequently, when at home, Ted was thrown very much upon his own resources, and left to find his own amusements and make his own friends; and, on the whole, I think he might have done worse than spend his

time so much as he did with Bob and John, although, during these Christmas holidays, they certainly led him into not a few scrapes, which indeed no boy could keep out of who was much in Master John's company.

I suppose there is no boy who reads this book but knows something of Penny Readings. There is scarcely a village or town in England without them, and very good things they are. Well, this winter the good folks—some of them at least—in Shedley, thought they would have Penny Readings of their own. The idea originated with some of the working-men, who had formed themselves into a club, thinking, and very rightly, that they had quite as much right to meet together for the purpose of draughts, chess, conversation, or reading, when they had done their hard day's work, as the fine gentlemen at the West-End had to come together after no work at all. Out of one good thing often comes another, and out of the working-men's club had arisen the Penny Readings; and, though this was the first winter, they were going on very well indeed, and giving great satisfaction and amusement to many every Wednesday evening. Neither Ted, John nor Bob had yet attended any of them, but the first Wednesday after the former had returned home, they were all going to do so, Ted's father, Mr. Harley, having promised to take the chair.

The different gentlemen in the village were in the habit of doing so alternately, and of reading aloud, and otherwise assisting the club on these evenings; but the

one who patronized them most graciously, and looked most affably upon their progress, was Strangeways Fripp, Esq. He was the greatest man in the village. There were richer men and better born, but no one who, like Mr. Fripp, had contrived so successfully to impress every one, not excepting himself, with such an overwhelming idea of his own importance. It was believed by some in Shedley that the cocks would cease to crow, and the clocks to strike, if anything went wrong with Mr. Fripp; that the whole machinery of the village would come to a stand-still, and nothing go right ever more, if he did not remain in it, and keep things going as they should do. He was a tall, portly man, with hair just turning gray — had been handsome in his time, and was still exceedingly good-looking. He had the blandest, most gracious manner possible; was uniformly courteous to every one, after an elaborate, dignified style of his own, which made all with whom he came in contact feel how very small they were, and how very good Mr. Fripp was in taking notice of them at all.

Now, as Mr. Fripp was quite as much persuaded as every one else that nothing in the village could go right without him, he was always present at the Penny Readings, and really made himself very useful at them. The National School boys were always there in great numbers, and sometimes were inclined to be a little unruly. A word or even a look, from Mr. Fripp, was sufficient to recall them to order, as they stood more in awe of him than even they

did of their master; while, if the laboring men, who formed the bulk of the audience, were inclined to show too plainly when a reading was of an undue length, or not to their taste, that they disapproved of it, Mr. Fripp's indignant "Silence there!" and the glance of offended majesty he cast round to see who was creating an uproar in his presence, had an immediate effect in causing silence. Mr. Fripp was superb when he took the chair; he praised every one and everything, as if he knew his praise was worth the having, and that, in bestowing it, he was conferring an inestimable reward; and, no doubt, in his own opinion, he was. Mr. Fripp was to read to-night; he was that rare thing, a good reader. I wonder, boys, whether all these Penny Readings will not, in time, make good readers of you! If so, the next generation will be much better off than we are in this.

Ted, Bob, and John were very early at the Readings. Mr. Harley was to come after in his phaeton, but the three boys had walked on first. It was a raw, cold night, and the roads were very sloppy and muddy. John had been so busy with some experiment he was concocting that he had not given himself time to dress properly, but had drawn on the first pair of boots which came to his hand; and, as these were thin ones, only fit for summer wear, his feet were damp when he arrived at the boys' school-room, where the meetings were held. Mr. Norton, the schoolmaster, who was always present on these occasions, heard him saying so to Ted and Bob, and good-naturedly asked him if he would step into the small class-room, which

was at the back of the large school-room, and dry his boots, as there was a good fire there. This was a very acceptable offer; and as it still wanted twenty minutes to eight, the hour at which the readings commence, the three boys, who were all cold, felt that they should spend the time while they were waiting much more agreeably there than in the large school-room, where as yet scarcely any one had arrived but themselves.

On entering the class-room, they saw Mr. Fripp warming his hands by the fire. He had been changing his boots: not for the world would Mr. Fripp have appeared on the platform in dirty ones, and therefore he always sent down a pair of dress-boots to put on when he arrived at the school-room. He had just placed the boots he had taken off in a cupboard he always appropriated for the purpose; and presently, after giving the young gentlemen a very encouraging "Good-evening," he went into the school-room so see if the lamps were being duly lit, and everything going on as it should do.

Everything would have gone on very well without Mr. Fripp, but then it was impossible for Mr. Fripp to believe that it could; so, after satisfying himself that all the arrangements were complete, he returned to his seat on the platform, a dignity which he shared in common with the Rector and the Chairman. Mr. Fripp always liked to sit there, to support the Chairman, as he said; that is, to encourage him if he was diffident, do his work for him if he was not quite up to it, and keep the school-boys in order if they

were disposed to be unruly. He sat there now, waiting for the Rector, a meek, placid, elderly gentleman, who came to the Penny Readings, not on account of any interest he could possibly have in any thing that was going on, as he detested music, disliked light reading, and thought no recitations in the world worth hearing but passages from Homer in the original Greek; but, as he was the Rector, he thought it incumbent on him to attend occasionally to see how the people were going on, to let them know that he was there to look after them, and to keep them from protracting the readings to an undue length, as he had a great aversion to late hours. Presently he came, and Mr. Fripp rose to receive him—a compliment he always paid the Rector—and they had a little chat together while waiting for the Chairman.

Meanwhile, John had been not only drying his boots, but informing Ted and Bob of an "idea" he had got, by which boots could be made waterproof. "It's a better thing than gutta-percha—done in half the time, and not half the trouble. It's melted glue, resin, and fine gravel all mixed up together; you put it on the soles, leave the boots to harden in the air, and, as soon as they're dry, you're all right. I've got some of the stuff in a bottle with me. I'd just finished making it when you fellows came. My mixture, I call it. I think I'll ask mother to let me take out a patent for it; I'm sure it would make my fortune. I wish I'd a pair of boots handy, just to show you two how it's done. I'd put it on my own, only I can't go

in the school-room without them, and the glue *must* be thoroughly dried in the air before the boots can be worn."

These remarks were overheard by a gentleman who was waiting in the class-room before he made his appearance on the platform. As a general rule, those who contributed to the amusement of the audience sat amongst them till their turn came to read, recite, or sing; but Mr. Gubbins was to appear in character—that of a negro—and was blacking his face preparatory to going on the platform. He was a mischievous fellow, and, unfortunately, not so strict in his regard to truth as he should have been when a joke was in the way; so, knowing where Mr. Fripp kept his boots, he fetched them from the cupboard, and unblushingly offered them to John as his own, requesting him, with the utmost civility, to be good enough to try his mixture upon them. It struck him that, if the glue did *not* dry on the boots, or Mr. Fripp were to warm his feet with them on, the consequences, when he attempted to move, might be rather amusing.

"They're a nice-looking pair," said Ted, eyeing Mr. Gubbins curiously; "and you've got a pair on your feet as well."

"Ah!" said Mr. Gubbins, rather loftily, "these are my every-day ones—good enough to act a nigger in; but the others are my Sunday best, and I walked here in them, and brought the old ones with me along with the other things for the part."

"All right!" said John, only too pleased to have a pair

of boots to operate upon; "I must get the stuff warm first, which I can do in the bottle that holds it, as it's stone."

He placed the bottle—which, indeed, was, as he said, quite stout enough to stand the fire—on the hob, and, as soon as the glue had melted, spread his mixture liberally on the soles of the boots, Mr. Gubbins politely holding them for the purpose; then the latter opened the window of the class-room and deposited Mr. Fripp's boots, soles upwards, on the sill, and, having closed it, proceeded with his toilet, while John and his friends went to the school-room for the purpose of witnessing the evening's performances.

Three front seats had been reserved for them by Mr. Harley. Ted set himself down by his mother; and, folding his arms and crossing his legs, prepared to criticise the evening's performances at his ease. Mr. Fripp was the first who read, and Ted listened attentively.

"He's done it very well—very well indeed," he said, when the other had finished. "A little more animation, and I think Mr. Fripp wouldn't be a bad reader."

Then followed a recitation—a comic one—by a young fellow whose very face made the audience laugh, it was so inexpressibly good-humored and mirthful; this was very well done, but it did not satisfy John.

"He's like old Fripp," said he—"wants a little more energy. Now I wonder how this fellow will do his part! Oh, there's two of them!—Warwick and Edward the Fourth, from Henry the Sixth."

Ted paid great attention to this. "Not so bad!" he

said, patronizingly, when it was over; "but I should like you to hear the fellows at our school—"

"It's not what I like, though," said John; "there's no 'go' in them. I've an 'idea' I should do that sort of thing much better myself. They do not throw enough spirit into the thing. I'll ask mother to let me recite next time, just to show them how it should be done. I suspect I should make them open their eyes a little."

Next followed a comic song, really very well sung, and then the blacksmith of the village gave a popular ditty, which was very much approved, for every boy joined in the chorus, and they always liked those songs best where they could do so, and the manner in which the burden of this song was rendered was almost deafening; in fact, the audience were so carried away with delight at their own vocal efforts, that they insisted upon an *encore*, which, though against the rules—for the Rector was very anxious that all should be over by half-past nine—was acceded to, and the chorus was joined in more lustily than ever, Bob and John joining in it as heartily as any one, while Ted still sat silent, with folded arms, smiling with conscious superiority.

"What a noise you fellows have been making!" he said, when the song was over. "It's rather caddish, you know, that kind of thing. We never have anything to do with stuff like that at the University. Hallo! here's my paternal relative going to read; now I wonder how *he*'ll do it!"

Master Ted prepared himself to criticise his father as

coolly and impartially as he had criticised every one else; and Mr. Harley read a very beautiful little story from Washington Irving's "Sketch Book," at the end of which his son observed, "Now that really was very well done; but I don't particularly admire Washington Irving myself."

Then the Rector read one of Cowper's shorter poems, which was not at all to Ted's taste, or John's either. As to Bob, he had no opinion of his own on such matters. He approved or disapproved just as his friends told him, and was therefore quite ready to agree with Ted when he observed—

"Don't think much of the piece, or the old gentleman's reading either. They didn't teach him to open his mouth wide enough when he went to school; that's a great point with our elocution-master."

The performances wound up, as usual, with "God save the Queen." A number of the schoolboys came on the platform and sang it, the audience joining in. It was a pretty sight to see the little fellows, with their chubby, well-washed faces, and well-worn garments, singing away with all their hearts and all their lungs. There were a dozen or more of them, the best singers in the school, and they always gave the National Anthem to conclude the Readings with. The Rector, however, ran away before they had finished singing; not that he was wanting in loyalty, but the readings had been protracted to an unusual length, and he did not like being out late himself, or encouraging other folks to be so. When the singing was

over, the audience departed, the boys, who were always there in great numbers, springing over the benches in rather a disorderly manner, till they were recalled to order by Mr. Fripp's dignified "Boys! boys!" when they went out a little more quietly, not choosing to incur any severe reprimand from Mr. Fripp, who still kept his eye upon them.

Mrs. Harley told Ted he had better walk home with his friends. She had one vacant seat in the carriage, but she was reserving that for Mr. Fripp, as she intended to ask him home to supper with her eldest daughter, Mrs. Glynn, who had come from London the preceding day, and had accompanied her to the Readings, and with her and Mr. Fripp the carriage would be quite full. That gentleman having seen the boys leave the school-room, got down from the platform himself, there being an opening at the back of it into the class-room, which was generally screened by a curtain. He found Oakes there, his man of all work, waiting, rather testily, to carry his master's dress-boots home; it was getting late, and Oakes disapproved, quite as much as the Rector did, of late hours. Mr. Fripp pulled off his boots and gave them to the old man, then proceeded to warm his feet before putting his others on, and next turned to the cupboard, which was close by the fireplace, where he had put them, for the purpose of taking them out.

But there were no boots there; and Mr. Gubbins, who was removing the black from his face, knew very well that

they were not there. He had gone to the window a few minutes before this, intending to fetch the boots in, and give the soles a good warming, thinking to derive a little amusement at Mr. Fripp's expense. It was a presumptuous thought, and Mr. Gubbins was punished for it in a manner he little expected. The boots had gone from the window-sill, nor had they dropped outside, for he sprang out of the window to look for them, but they were not to be found. Mr. Gubbins got in again, feeling almost as much vexed as if the boots had been his own. Mr. Fripp had been a good friend to the club, and this would look as if some of its members had returned his kindness by stealing his boots. A joke was one thing, thought Mr. Gubbins, but a theft was quite another, and he resolved to lose no time in washing his face, making himself look a little more like a decent working-man, and a little less like a "nigger," and start off to try if he could recover Mr. Fripp's property.

Meanwhile, that gentleman, indignant at finding his boots gone, called loudly for Mr. Norton, the schoolmaster, and told him what had happened. Mr. Norton was surprised and annoyed, and began a vigorous search after the missing articles. Mr. Gubbins assisted, declaiming loudly against whoever could have taken them, but the boots were not forthcoming. Mr. Fripp became very angry. He felt that some one had been playing him a trick, and he naturally resented their doing so. Indeed, he was much more indignant than he would have been if he had

merely believed the boots to have been stolen. Unlike Mr. Gubbins, he thought a joke a much more unpardonable offence than a theft, when that joke was practised upon Strangeways Fripp, Esq.

Mr. Harley was about to leave the platform for the purpose of joining his wife in the school-room, when she, followed by Mrs. Glynn, went up to him. "Have you asked Mr. Fripp to come home with us to supper?" she said.

"Quite forgot it, my dear," said Mr. Harley. "He's only in the class-room here—suppose you do so yourself."

"Come with me, Mary," said Mrs. Harley to her daugh ter, "and I'll introduce you to him at the same time."

The two ladies entered the class-room, to Mr. Fripp's extreme discomfiture. To think of his being seen by ladies in his stockings! and what made matters worse was, that the big toe of one of his feet was pushing its way through a small hole which had been worn into the stocking since the morning. He looked aghast at the hole! How should he hide it from Mrs. Harley's eyes, and from those of the strange lady with her? He thought he would cover one foot with the other, and try if that would do. It concealed the hole certainly; but standing in this position to salute a lady is rather awkward, as you will find, boys, if you try it; and then it simply hid the hole, and not the fact that he was still in his stockings, and how could he shake hands with Mrs. Harley without first explaining how it was he happened to be so?

On came Mrs. Harley, smiling and with outstretched hand. She was tall and stout, with voluminous skirts, and her daughter was quite as tall, and her skirts as wide as her mother's. Mr. Fripp felt himself overpowered as they bore down upon him; and, when Mrs. Harley shook hands with him, in the most friendly manner possible, and introduced him to her daughter, he wished the floor of the school-room would open and let him through. Mrs. Glynn bowed, and he had to bow in return, and in so doing was nearly thrown off his balance; then Mrs. Harley gave him her invitation to supper, which he hesitated about accepting, for how could he go out to supper without his boots? Mrs. Glynn glanced at his feet: "Oh, mamma, we are keeping Mr. Fripp all this time standing without his boots!"

Mr. Fripp began a labored explanation as to his boots being mislaid, when Mrs. Glynn and her mother begged him to sit down while waiting for their being found; but how could Mr. Fripp walk to a chair without exposing that unlucky hole? Mrs. Glynn saw his perplexity, and enjoyed it; she guessed the state of the case as far as the hole was concerned, as not for a second would Mr. Fripp change the position of his feet; but her good-nature getting the better of her love of fun, she turned her head aside, and drew her mother gently away, that Mr. Fripp might have an opportunity of drawing on his boots undisturbed. This was very good of her, if only Mr. Fripp had had his boots to put on. He was able to stand at ease for a moment or so, and to look round to see if the boots were

forthcoming; but Mr. Norton came up with a puzzled face to say the boots could not be found, and the only thing he could suggest was for Mr. Fripp to put on a pair of his own, for which he would send to his house at once; but Mr. Norton was a small man, and Mr. Fripp, to say the least, a stout one; so, when the boots came, it was a work of no small difficulty for him to draw them on, and a very painful exertion for him to reach Mr. Harley's carriage. It was quite impossible for him to maintain his accustomed majesty of movement under such circumstances, still less to behave with his accustomed urbanity and politeness to the ladies he was accompanying, and he had to suffer both Mrs. Harley and her daughter to get into the carriage without his assistance, and to sit in torture the whole time of the drive, and at last to borrow a pair of boots of Mr Harley (who was nearer his own figure than Mr. Norton) to walk home in, as it was quite out of the question that he could do so in the pair Mr. Norton had lent him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S SPELL. HOW MR. TAGART FOUND HIS BOOTS AN UNPLEASANTLY TIGHT FIT.

TED had been very much vexed that Mr. Fripp should have lost his boots through the experiment his friend John had played upon them. He said nothing, however, as to his own knowledge of the manner in which they might have disappeared, as he would have thought it "sneaky" to have told of John's share in the matter; but he resolved to go next morning with both John and Bob to Mr. Gubbins and insist upon his restoring the property which, in his own mind, he felt convinced Gubbins had stolen. Mr. Gubbins having promised the boys to take the boots in from the window as soon as the glue had hardened, it was not unnatural for Ted to imagine that he had taken a fancy to them for himself.

But while Ted was entertaining these hard thoughts of Mr. Gubbins, that gentleman was exerting himself vigorously to restore the missing property. He felt the honor of the club was at stake, as no one had been in the room from the time Mr. Fripp changed his boots till he re-entered it but the three boys and different members of

the club, and suspicion would be sure to rest upon some of the latter, and there was no way of removing it but by avowing the experiment that had been tried upon them, which Mr. Gubbins, for many reasons, felt disinclined to do, unless he could find the thief and induce him to give up his plunder. Now the thief, Mr. Gubbins thought, was not likely to be very far off. A narrow passage, much too narrow to be called even a lane, ran by the side of the class-room window, and led to the back entrance of a low beer-shop where the worst characters in Shedley congregated. Mr. Gubbins knew this place very well, as, before he joined the working-men's club, he had been one of the most frequent guests; but he had discontinued his visits there for some time past, spending his spare time in the reading-room of the club, or in preparing for his own performances in public; and, though singing nigger songs with a blackened face may not be a very intellectual amusement, at any rate it is a better one than any likely to be found in the taproom of a low public-house.

However, it was to this very public-house that Mr. Gubbins now bent his steps. He opened the door without the ceremony of knocking, and went at once to the taproom, where he found several of his former acquaintances seated, singing coarse songs and drinking bad beer. He had a warm welcome; they were glad to see him amongst them again, especially as they were planning a midnight foray upon some adjacent preserves, and thought Mr. Gubbins, who had formerly been possessed of considerable skill in

carrying out such schemes, might lend them some assistance. He took a pipe along with the rest, and joined in the talk, looking sharply round the while to see if any of them were wearing a better pair of boots than usual. No; there was not a foot there with anything upon it but the thick clouted hobnailed shoes usually worn by laborers; but Mr. Gubbins did not give up hope. Close by the fire he saw a thick stout bag belonging to one Bill Tagart, a notorious rat-catcher, and through the folds of this bag he fancied he could trace the outlines of a pair of boots. Bill earned a fair livelihood by his trade, but he was not too particular what he turned his hand to, and often, when catching rats, had opportunities of finding out the unprotected parts of fowlhouses, or the walls where peaches and nectarines grew thickest. He did a little poaching, too, now and then—anything, as he said, to earn an honest penny, he was not particular what.

Mr. Gubbins soon heard what was in contemplation. The time was drawing on, and he was plainly told that his assistance would be acceptable; but he had no wish to embark in such schemes again. He was beginning to have a taste for something better; but he did not consider it prudent, under present circumstances, to say so. He heard what was wanted of him, and then replied, thoughtfully,—

"It's all very well, but we've had a week's rain, and tramping through Black's ground with one's shoe-leather the thickness of brown paper don't suit a fellow that's delicate at his chest!—don't laugh!" Mr. Gubbins was the

wag of the village, and people expected, as a matter of course, he would say something funny whenever he opened his mouth. "I've been that hoarse to-night I could hardly get through my part. It's all my own fault. I've had the money by me the last fortnight for a new pair of boots, and been too lazy to go to Old Cross for them; and look at these things!—my feet are nigh to the ground in them."

He exhibited his boots to Bill Tagart, who agreed with him that they certainly were very thin and worn.

"It's a pity that should keep you from going with us," he said. "The game's as thick as blackberries in autumn, and we're rather short-handed. What might you think of giving now for a pair of boots?"

Mr. Gubbins took out a little mole-skin purse, and began counting his money. Bill Tagart eyed it greedily, and said, "If I thought you'd give a fair price for a really first-rate thing, I've got a pair here as I shouldn't mind letting you have. They're too big for me, and so I brought 'em here to ask Jones to set 'em against my score. But if you like 'em I'll let you have the first offer. I haven't worn 'em above half-a-dozen times, and they're reg'lar good 'uns. Come, you shall have 'em for seven-and-six. It's giving them away, but I want you to be one of us to-night."

So saying, Bill Tagart produced Mr. Fripp's boots from his bag. Mr. Gubbins examined them as if he had never seen them in his life before, and observed to his great satisfaction that the glue and resin which Master John had stuck

so freely on the soles had not lost any of their tenacious qualities through contact with the earth. He put his hand inside and felt them, then shook his head gravely, "They're precious damp; you might have dried 'em, Bill, before you brought them out; let them lay before the fire for a bit, and then I'll try them on."

He placed them with the soles towards the fire, and went on smoking his pipe. When he thought sufficient time had elapsed for the glue to be thoroughly melted, he took his pipe out of his mouth, and said—

"Do you mean to tell me you ever got those boots on *your* feet, Bill?"

"Yes, to be sure; and found 'em a deal too big; don't I tell you that's why I want to part with 'em?"

"Don't believe you could get them on, if you were to try; and, what's more, I don't believe they're yours any more than they're mine."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Tagart, angrily.

"I tell you I don't believe you ever wore those boots in your life, or ever saw them before to-night; and if you get them on, just see if you can get them off again, that's all; I'll lay the seven-and-sixpence against the boots, that if they're not honestly yours, you don't."

"And how do you mean to find out?"

"My great-grandmother's way; she was a clever woman—cunning, they called it, at those times; and if she wanted to find out a thief she'd stand him in the middle of the floor, draw a circle round him, and out of it he couldn't

pass till he'd agreed to give up whatever he'd stolen Now, if you like to bet the boots against the seven-and-sixpence that they're yours, I'll take it, provided you agree to let me try it by my grandmother's circle."

"You mean to say if I can jump out of the circle the seven-and-sixpence is to be mine, and if not the boots to be yours. Done, my boy! You may as well hand over the money at once," said Mr. Tagart.

"Not quite so fast; you must jump out of it *in* the boots; and if you stole them they'll hold you fast inside."

"Then the first thing is to get the boots on," observed Mr. Tagart, commencing to do so.

"Yes, but you must step in the circle, and draw them on there," replied Mr. Gubbins, taking the boot away from the other, and replacing it before the fire. Then he took a piece of chalk out of his pocket, and drew a large circle on the ground. "Now, step into that," he said to Tagart; "put the boots on when you're in it, and stand stock still while I count a hundred; you must not move or speak, or you'll break the spell."

"All right," cried Tagart, doing just as he was told; then when the boots were on, he stood firmly on his feet in the middle of the circle, with his arms akimbo and his pipe in his mouth, looking triumphantly at his friends; and feeling as sure of the seven-and-sixpence as if he already had it in his pocket. Mr. Gubbins, with a grave face walked slowly round the circle, counting very deliberately,

while Jones, the landlord, and the rest of the guests laughed and made coarse jokes, and did their best to make Tagart laugh or speak in return. He kept his composure, however, and smoked immovably on till Mr. Gubbins came to ninety-eight, ninety-nine, a hundred, when he attempted to spring out of the circle, but found himself held fast.

He took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked round affrighted. He began to think there was something in the great-grandmother's spell after all. He tried again to lift his feet, but John's glue was very strong, and Mr. Tagart did not use all the force he might have done had he not been rather afraid that some charm was in operation against him. Every one present but Mr. Gubbins began to feel rather uncomfortable. As to Jones, the landlord, it occurred to him that it would be an extremely unpleasant thing and very much in the way of business if Bill Tagart were to stick in the middle of his floor for ever, so he took his pipe out of his mouth, and said gruffly, "Come out o' that, can't you?"

"Wish I could," said Tagart. "I say, Gubbins, this is a rum sort o' joke; I didn't agree for to stand here for ever, and how are you to get the boots if I'm fixed in them?"

"Then I've won the bet?" asked Gubbins; "you'll agree to that?"

"Oh, bother it, yes! I'll agree to anything if I can only get out of this."

"Stealing the boots and all?" said Gubbins significantly.

"No, not I. What a man finds he has a right to keep hasn't he? But I'll own that I found the boots instead of buying them, as I told you; and as soon as I can get out of them you may have 'em."

"No, I shall take them back to the right owner," replied Gubbins, "my great-grandmother won't let me have any peace else."

"Your great-grandmother!" cried Tagart, turning pale; "you don't mean to say she's really a hand in this?"

"Hasn't she—what else is keeping you there? Isn't the old lady a-stooping down behind you, and holding you to the floor as hard as she can?"

"I'm not going to stop here I know, to be held down by any one's dead grandmother!" cried Tagart, trying hard to free his feet from the boots, but he was afraid to use his own hands to help him, for fear of encountering the ghostly ones of the defunct old lady. Mr. Fripp's boots were an easy fit for him, and he succeeded in pulling one foot out, but, in releasing the other, the glue gave way, and the boot becoming loosened, Mr. Tagart was thrown violently back full length on the ground, when the lookers-on, who were fast beginning to suspect something ghostly was at work, set up a cry of dismay, and Mr. Gubbins cried, in a terror-stricken voice, "She's done it!"

Mr. Tagart really believed she had, for he sprang to his feet, and without even stopping to pick up his own

boots, rushed out of the beer-shop, and ran home as fast as he could, while Gubbins went up to Mr. Fripp's boots, and with scarcely any exertion—for the efforts Tagart had made to release himself from them had greatly loosened the glue—raised them from the ground, and carried them off in triumph.

CHAPTER V.

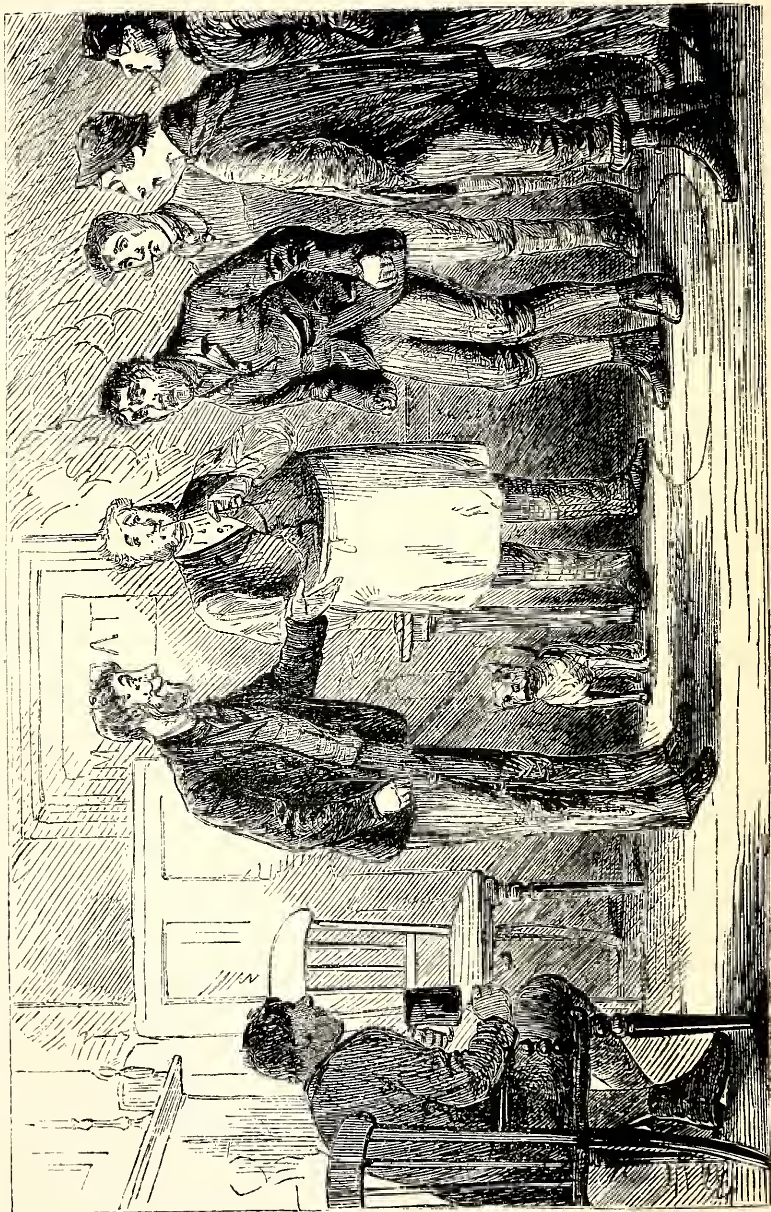
HOW JOHN'S NEW "MIXTURE" TURNS OUT A BETTER THING THAN HE HAD EXPECTED.

MASTER JOHN was indulging in a sweet dream the next morning—a dream in which he imagined that he was pouring his "mixture" on the Prince of Wales' boots, while the Queen with her own royal hands was making out his patent—when he was aroused by Martha entering his room, and informing him that there was a man below who wished to see him about something very particular. Up John sprang—"Some one's heard of my 'mixture,' and wants me to put it on their boots for them. To think of its getting known like this already!"

He was dressed in five minutes, and ran down stairs, where he found Mr. Gubbins with a parcel under his arm awaiting him in the kitchen. He came towards him with a mysterious look, and shutting the door, said, "Have you heard about the boots, Master Ashdell?"

"No; what about them?" asked John, eagerly.

"They was walked away with last night; but, however, I found where they'd got to, and made the party as



had helped hisself to them, give them back, and here they are all right, only the worst of it is, they've knocked some of the stuff off; and perhaps, Master Ashdell, you wouldn't mind putting a little more on. Look, they've used them badly, haven't they; but don't let the maids know anything of it. I'd keep my mouth shut about the 'mixture, if I was you, Master Ashdell, if you don't, other folks will be trying to make something like it."

"All right; Martha's setting the breakfast, and won't be here for another ten minutes, and I'll do the boots in half that time," said John.

He had brought his bottle with him, and the glue was soon warmed and poured on the boots, then Mr. Gubbins said, "Now it's right you should know the truth, Master Ashdell. The boots isn't mine at all, but Mr. Fripp's, and he thinks he's lost 'em; so if you hear any fuss about it, you'll know it's all right, and he'll get 'em back to-night. I've punished the party pretty well as took 'em, for I shouldn't like it thought the Club was thieves. Now, would you mind writing me a note, Master Ashdell, for the boots to excuse themselves for stopping out without permission?"

"All right," replied John, rather flattered at the request, and the confidence reposed in him. He led the way to an untidy little den of his own, where he concocted his experiments, and which he called his study. "What shall I write?" he asked when they were there.

Mr. Gubbins hesitated; "Well, perhaps something like

this, 'Honored sir, we beg pardon for making holiday, but thought we should like a turn by ourselves. We're all right now, and won't go larking any more. Your humble servants, Boots. Strangeways Fripp, Esq.'"

John was not at all disinclined to play a joke upon Mr. Fripp, so he wrote the note in his best small round-hand. Mr. Gubbins said he would append it to the boots as soon as they were dry, and that he should leave them after dark; all of which he did, greatly to Mr. Fripp's discomfiture, as he was more than ever convinced that some one had been playing a joke upon him, and till now he had not imagined the individual breathed audacious enough to perpetrate a joke upon Strangeways Fripp, Esq.

He was so disgusted with the boots that he did not put them on for nearly a week, at the end of which time he was again to be present at the Penny Readings. The night being fine, he resolved to wear the same boots on the platform that he had walked to the school-room in, indeed, he never intended for the future to change his boots there at all, but to ride whenever the paths were muddy, and finding these unlucky boots the only clean pair on his boot-horse, he drew them on just before he started for the Readings, thinking it would be a strange thing this time if another joke were played through their agency. He little knew the breadth and width of Master John's "idea," and certainly never dreamed what sins Mr. Gubbins was capable of perpetrating. He took unusual pains with his toilet that evening. The night being fine, and the performances

attractive, the room was likely to be crowded, and several ladies of his acquaintance to be present. The chairman for the evening was an intimate friend of his, and Mr. Fripp felt it incumbent on him to be present, or perhaps after the affront he had received on the previous occasion, he might not have gone at all. As it was, he determined not only to go, but to grace the occasion as much as possible.

He had not proceeded a dozen yards on the road towards the school-room, when he was overtaken by the carriage of Mr. Burnes, the chairman for the evening. It was a fine starlight night, and Mr. Fripp being recognized, was asked if he would ride instead of walk to the Readings, which he graciously consented to do. Then when he came to the school-room, he took his seat on the left hand of the chairman, and looked round the room with that blandly patronizing manner of his which made every one feel, on whom his eyes rested, how good and gracious it was of Strangeways Fripp, Esq., to come there to look at them!

Mr. Burnes was a stout, pursy little man, with a florid face, and carroty hair and whiskers, and a nose and chin that reminded you, whenever he opened his mouth to speak, of a pair of Swiss nut-crackers, they went up and down with such a droll clip-clapper fashion. This was the first time he had been chairman either here or anywhere else, and he was very anxious to perform the office in a creditable manner, and as, although he had lately made a great deal of money and set up his carriage, he was neither

a gentleman nor a particularly well-educated man, he fell into some sad blunders, which the critical ears of Master Theodore Harley were very quick in detecting. That young gentleman was in one of the front seats looking calmly contemptuous of everything going on. There was something deliciously supercilious in his attitude as he sat with his arms folded, and his legs crossed. My belief is that he thought every one in the room, including even the rector, the chairman, and Strangeways Fripp, Esq., ought to feel flattered by having a pupil of the South Middlesex College amongst them. John and Bob were one on each side of him, the former had obtained permission of his mother to recite that evening, and had prevailed on Bob to do so with him. The piece was "Lochiel and the Seer," and John felt that in the Seer he should have a fine opportunity of showing the public how to suit the action to the word, and the word to the action. He had had a great deal of trouble with Bob; first to get him to learn his part, and then to recite it properly. Indeed, as soon as Bob had mastered one line he forgot the one before it, and John had to act Lochiel before him, to show what attitudes he should assume. And now and then Bob got cross, and declared the whole thing was such a bother he would give it up altogether. Then John asked Ted if he would take Bob's place, but Ted declined with scorn that was grand to see.

"Of course it's not that I *couldn't* do it," he observed; "I should know the part when I'd read it three times

over, but our fellows think Penny Readings low, and if they found out I'd recited at one, I should have no end of chaff. You must *make* Thorley do it. Tell him you'll give him a licking if he don't."

John would have been sorry to do that with Bob, he had always been good friends with his cousin, and at last he prevailed on him to try again, and study the part thoroughly. They had rehearsed it just before starting that evening, and Bob seemed tolerably perfect in it, but he brought the book with him to refresh his memory at the last minute, "For," he said, "the worst of it is, as soon as I put it in on one side of my head, it runs out on the other."

Mr. Burnes opened the proceedings with some prefatory remarks, in which he expressed his gratification at seeing the room so full, and at the night being so fine. Then he added that as very few of them were supplied with programmes, he would read out the list of the evening's performances to them. This would have been all very well if he had not added, that, "When we dine at a hotel we like to look over the bill of fare, and see what is coming," and he considered the same rule applied to the programme of the evening's amusements. Now, as this observation was addressed to an audience, the great majority of which were working-men, to whom a slice of roast beef would have been a banquet, and who were quite unable to form the remotest conception of what a hotel dinner really consisted, it was not perhaps in the very best taste; but

then Mr. Burnes had not long returned from a continental tour, and liked people to know it. Master Theodore smiled with ineffable scorn when he heard him; "Precious cad the fellow must be to talk like that!" he whispered to John; "I suppose he wants us all to know he's had a good dinner for once in his life."

Then some of the national school-boys stood up and recited a short dramatic piece, and very well the little fellows did it. Even Master Ted condescended to express his approval by languidly clapping his hands, and the chairman, who thought this a good opportunity of giving a little judicious praise, observed that the performance put him very much in mind of what he had heard of the dramatic performances of the Westminster boys, which, however, he never as yet had the pleasure of witnessing.

This remark fell rather flat, as there were not perhaps a dozen people in the audience who knew what the Westminster performances were, while Ted, who did, observed, "And I wonder if he would have understood a word of them if he had. What does the fellow mean by making such a donkey of himself! It's your turn now, Thorley. I hope you haven't forgotten *every* word of your part."

"Don't bother," said Bob savagely, and followed John on to the platform. Now, to make you understand thoroughly what next took place, I must do what perhaps I should have done sooner, describe the school-room and the platform. The room was large, and hung, as school-rooms mostly are, with maps. It was lit by naphtha, the

smell of which was at times more powerful than pleasant, and the seats were forms or Windsor chairs. The platform was raised three feet from the ground, and there were chairs on it for the rector, the chairman and Strangeways Fripp, Esq. On each side the room were windows, and one overlooked the end of the platform, on which, the night being cold, they had placed a small stove, and Mr. Fripp, who sat nearest, had the full benefit of it, and enjoyed it very much, toasting his feet as comfortably as if he had been by his own fireside. He smiled encouragingly to the boys as they stepped on the platform, and that smile put everything out of poor Bob's head.

"Oh, dear; oh dear!" he thought, "if only he wasn't there, I could get through it pretty well, and then there's the rector and Mr. Burnes—a pretty go it'll be if I make a mess of it before them all!"

John began waving his hand, "Lochiel! Lochiel! beware of the day," and on he went, not missing a word till he had finished his first speech, in a voice that would have filled even a larger room.

"No wonder that boy never knows his lessons," thought the rector—who knew John very well, and had a profound contempt for all poetry that was not two thousand years old—"when he gives his mind to such stuff as that," and it being now poor Bob's turn, he began in a very feeble voice—

"Go preach to the coward, thou death-telling seer."

"That's one line," thought Bob, "and I know there's

three more, but I haven't the least notion what they are." Mr. Norton, who had Campbell's Works open at the poem, softly prompted him, and Bob stammered through the other lines; then John began with renewed energy—

"Ha! laugh'st thou, Lochiel, my vision to scorn!"

And he advanced nearer to Bob, waving his arm in a threatening manner, which poor Bob imagined was meant for him *in propria persona*, and not in his character of Lochiel. "He promised me a licking if I didn't know my part," he thought, ruefully, "and I suppose he'll keep his word," but in fact John was only carrying out his own "ideas" of recitation, and declaiming, as he thought, with proper dramatic force. However, he frightened every word of poor Bob's speech out of his head, and when he had concluded his own, Bob stood mute, with open mouth, looking vacantly round as if to see whether he could find his part written on the walls. Mr. Norton softly prompted him, and Bob, stooping forward, repeated every word after him, which made his performance of rather a monotonous character, especially as not a line he said could be heard by one-half the audience. The rector, at the very beginning of his speech, had closed his eyes, and the soothing tone of Mr. Norton's low voice, and Bob's scarcely louder repetition of what he read, sent him off into a nap, and when Bob concluded with, "All plaided and plumed in their Tartan array," a very audible snore was heard, which evidently proceeded from the rector.

Uncle George was amongst the audience, and so was

John's mother. She felt very sorry for Bob, and very proud of her own boy. "How well he does it, don't he?" she whispered to her brother. "What a pity poor dear Bob hasn't a little of John's ability!"

"What a muff that fellow Thorley is," thought Ted; "I know if he were *my* cousin, I'd teach him not to make such a spoon of himself. It would only be common kindness to give him a licking, just to teach him not to make such a muff of himself again."

John went nearer to Bob, and similar thoughts to those Ted entertained were passing through his mind. "I'll pay you out for this as soon as we're outside," he said *sotto voce*. Then he raised his voice, and thundered forth—

"Lochiel, Lochiel! beware of the day!"

"I expect I shall catch it," thought Bob, "and I know John *can* lick me if he likes. He's getting into a regular wax; I do believe he means to pay me out before them all."

It really looked like it. John was getting full of the spirit of his part, and sending forth the wizard's prophecies with a force and energy that startled every one in the room, excepting the rector, who, good old gentleman, had had a hard day's work visiting his parishioners at the furthest ends of the village, and had really earned the slumber he was now enjoying. John pressed closer and closer on his cousin, who retreated before him. "I know I shall hit back if he hits me," thought Bob, "and a nice thing it'll be to have a fight on the platform."

"Rise, rise! ye wild tempests," shouted John, and took another stride which would have brought him in contact with Bob, had not the latter sprung back, feeling thoroughly frightened, with such a bound that his head dashed through one of the panes of the window which was behind him, and then Bob, finding himself cut by the glass, and no possibility of further retreat, shouted out—

"Don't get in such a wax, John! 'Pon my word, I'll learn it better another time."

This "brought down the house," as they say at the theatres. Ted set the example by clapping his hands, and shouting "Bravo!" and as those near him could not help laughing at poor Bob's predicament, the people in the back seats thought they were justified in doing so too. Whenever the aristocrats in the threepenny seats applauded, the working-folks in the penny places always followed suit, and they clapped their hands and shouted "Encore," and almost shrieked with mirth, just as if poor Bob had broken the window with his head on purpose to please them.

The window-panes were very small, and poor Bob found himself, as he expressed it, in a precious fix. He was afraid to move, for fear of cutting himself worse, til Mr. Norton came to his rescue, and gently extricated him. The rector was roused by the uproar, and opening his eyes, looked wonderingly about him. Then he saw Bob's position, and thought at first, with the audience on the back seats, that it was part of the performance.

"And a very reprehensible part, too," the old gentle-

man observed to Mr. Burnes, and was about to tell Bob as much when that luckless boy burst into tears; "Please, sir, I didn't mean to do it, and if I'm to pay for the window, who's to pay for the sticking-plaster for my head?"

"Hold your tongue, stupid!" said John; "Uncle will make it all right about the window. Just wipe your face, and come and say what you've got to say properly. I never knew such a mess as you've made of the whole thing."

"Mess, indeed! I think I'm in one," cried Bob, pitifully; "I couldn't say a word more if it was ever so."

Mr. Norton settled the matter by taking Bob into the class-room, where he bathed his head, and John's mother came there and inspected his wounds, which were not very serious, and were soon set to rights by a little sticking-plaster, which she sent out for. Then Bob resumed his seat amongst the audience, and the performances went on as before, till Mr. Fripp rose to return thanks to the chairman for his services that evening.

He was some time doing so, as he brought in several other matters, amongst them an allusion to the unfortunate accident that had occurred that evening—the first time anything of the kind had alloyed the pleasure which the Readings afforded. He thought of his own boots, but he was not going to stand there and tell people a joke had been played upon him, and he concluded by saying, "We will now wind up the evening's amusement by singing 'God Save the Queen.'"

On came the boys, and Mr. Fripp as usual saw that

they were orderly and quiet. He was about to turn to go to the back of the platform, when he felt himself fixed to the spot where he stood. He colored up to his very temples. Had any one dared to play a fresh trick upon him; and yet how was it possible that anything could hold him there against his will? He tried to lift his foot again, but it was useless, and there he stood immovable, while the boys were lifting up their voices all around him. He waited till they had finished, and then tried again, this time with more success, for he raised his foot at last with such a sudden jerk that he almost fell backwards into the arms of Mr. Burnes, who had just come forward to see if he was ill. Indeed, every one was stopping to look at Mr. Fripp, feeling that something ailed him, and there he stood on the front of the platform with one foot free, but the other gummed as it were immovably to the ground. It was trying to Mr. Fripp's dignity—it was even more so than it had been on the night when his boots were stolen—every one was looking concerned, as if they felt he must be ill to stand like this, and better that they should think him ill than the victim of a joke. Joke, indeed! what would they not be capable of who played a joke on Strangeways Fripp, Esq.

But how was he to get away? And how explain the very awkward position he was in without being laughed at? And when Mr. Fripp thought of *his* being laughed at, he felt as if the world must be coming to an end. He had never been laughed at in his life. Even his nurse, when he ran about in short petticoats and bare legs, would not

have taken such a liberty, and were all these boys—confound the little brats!—and working-men—hang the stupid clod-hoppers!—and his own friends—friends! they were always the first to make fun of any unfortunate! and ladies—there was nothing like woman for giggling—to turn him into ridicule now? Mr. Fripp's forehead became bathed in perspiration at the bare idea, and again he tried to lift his foot, but the glue on that must have been more thoroughly melted than on the other, for he found the effort useless.

"I'm afraid you're ill," said Mr. Burnes; "let me take you away."

"It's nothing," replied Mr. Fripp, "only a little faintness with the heat; clear the room, and it will pass."

People were very slow, however, about going. They seemed to take a perverse pleasure in looking at Mr. Fripp, and at last, tired of standing there, he made one desperate effort to get loose, and succeeded in freeing his foot, but at a terrible sacrifice of his personal dignity. Down he fell in a sitting position on the platform, the violent jerk with which he had wrenched his foot from the boards throwing him completely off his equilibrium, and while Mr. Burnes, the rector, and Mr. Norton rushed towards him, thinking he was either deranged or seized with a stroke of apoplexy, a roar of applause and laughter burst from the lower portion of the audience, who actually had the presumption to imagine that Strangeways Fripp, Esq., was a fit subject for merriment. He stared around him for a moment, totally overcome, not only by the fall, but by the sensation it had

created, and then got up and walked off the platform with as much dignity as the boots (which at every step kept sticking to the ground, as if loath to leave it) would permit him, mentally vowing that those unlucky articles should never be worn by him again.

"What on earth's the matter with old Fripp?" said Ted, with shocking irreverence, to his friends. Mr. Gubbins, who was standing by, heard the question, and whispered mysteriously to John, "It's all along o' your 'mixture,' Master Ashdell."

"My 'mixture'!" cried John, in amaze; "what's that got to do with it?"

"A deal more than you think for," replied Mr. Gubbins in the same subdued tone. "When it's hot it sticks like wax! That's what kept Mr. Fripp fixed there."

"You don't say so!" cried Ted. "John, I shall begin to believe in your 'mixture' after all. To think of it serving old Fripp out like that! Do let me have a bottle to take back to school. I'll pay for all the stuff costs. I should so like to try it on some of the masters."

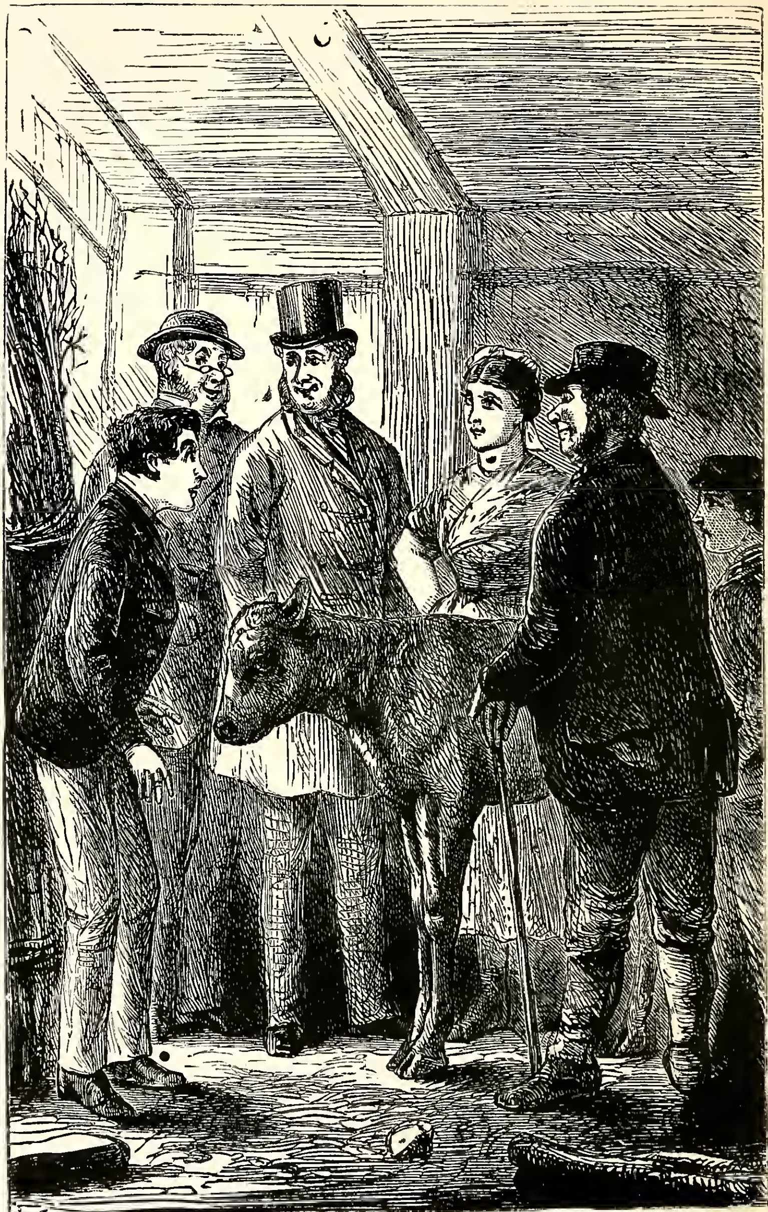
"No, I don't like my experiments turned into jokes," said John, seriously, "and as this don't seem quite the thing for boots on account of its stickiness when warm, I sha'n't take out a patent for it as I thought of doing. But I've an 'idea' it'll make capital cement for china, and I'll find all the broken bits I can at home and stick them together with it. I don't know but that move will pay better than the other. 'Crystalline Cement' I shall call it now. I tell you

what, you fellows, I ought to make my fortune by it, and when I do I'll send old Fripp an anonymous present of a new pair of Wellingtons, to make up for the fix he's got into to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

JOHN'S "RATIONAL INVESTMENT" OF HALF-A-CROWN. HOW TO BOARD A CALF.

I HAVE spoken of Uncle George's cow,—a very nice, useful creature she was, giving splendid milk, and plenty of it. After a time madam cow had a calf, which Uncle George told Tim to dispose of as soon as possible to the best bidder. Being an Alderney it was not worth much to the butcher, but to any one who had a cow to act as wet-nurse, it would be likely to prove a valuable animal. But no one in the village seemed just then in want of a calf, and Tim at last put it into his cart with the intention of driving down as far as Old Cross, in the hope of finding a buyer for the little creature there. He had not gone far before he met with Joseph Dale, an acquaintance and near neighbor of his Joseph had been to St. Maur, buying some bargains, and was returning home very well pleased with some wonderfully cheap kettles, and a famous lot of crockery he had secured, to use his own words, "for next to nothing." Mr. Dale bought everything—pots, pans, rags, bones, old chairs, broken-legged tables, worn-out bedsteads,



waste paper, old iron—let it be what it might, nothing came amiss to Mr. Dale. He did not keep a shop, but lived in a little cottage that he had built for himself on a small plot of land, which had been one of his bargains, and the front garden now and then, when he had anything especially attractive to dispose of, served as an open-air show-room. He had a perfect mania for buying, and never liked to let anything slip through his fingers that he could possibly see a chance of disposing of again. Let it be what it might, he was sure, he would say, to turn a penny over by it in time.

Tim was perfectly aware that Dale bought almost everything that could be bought, but it certainly never occurred to him that he would buy a calf, and he was passing his acquaintance with a nod and a "good-day," when the other stopped him, and inquired where he was going to take the calf, and what he wanted for it.

"To Old Cross, and it ought to fetch a guinea," replied Tim. "It's worth two to any one that has got a cow to take it."

Mr. Dale looked at the calf, poked its ribs, peered into its eyes, felt its legs, and would have opened its mouth only it was muzzled, then he said to Tim, "If you like to take ten shillings I'll give it ye for the creature."

Tim shook his head. "It's worth twice that, but say twelve-and-six, and you shall have it."

Mr. Dale hesitated a little; at last the bargain was concluded at twelve shillings, and Tim, very well pleased with

having found a customer for the calf, went home with the money to his mistress.

"Whatever Dale will do with the creature is more than I can tell," he thought; "he'll have to bring it up by hand. A nice treat that for his wife! It'll be as much plague as a couple of babies; however, that's her affair, not mine. It's a chance if I should have got more than ten shillings for it at Old Cross if I'd carried it down there."

Tim was reminded by his mistress that he had still to go to Old Cross, as the family were in want of potatoes, and he had been charged to bring home a sack. There was a little delay in starting, as a customer came in, and his master being out, Tim had to attend to him; then just as he was about to go, John came running up, and asked Tim if he was going to Old Cross, intimating that if he was he should like to go with him, there being a holiday at school, and Master John having nothing particular to amuse himself with.

Tim demurred a little; he had got into such trouble on the last occasion that he took John with him to Old Cross, that he was not very anxious to have his company now; but John was urgent; he had had half-a-crown given him by an uncle from London, and he wanted to spend it. John was one of those boys—there are a great many of them, by-the-bye—whose money always seems to be burning a hole in their pockets, and, it being market-day, he had, as he told Tim, an "idea" that he could do something better with this half-crown than lay it out in either tops or toffee. At last

Tim consented, and John got into the cart, and started off in high glee for Old Cross.

"It's such nonsense of fellows throwing money away, Tim, on a pack of rubbish that only makes them sick; that's what I've been telling Bob. Now, it's not very often I have the luck to get a whole half-crown, and I'm determined to do something sensible with this. How are pigs going now, Tim? asked John, with the air of a farmer contemplating an addition to his stock.

"They're almost being given away, barley-meal's so lear; but I don't think you'll be able to buy one for half-a-crown, and if you did get it for that, how would you fatten it, Master John? Boil nettles or cook dead leaves for it, eh? What a pity, now, you did not try your hand on the calf I've just been selling! only I would not have let it go for half-a-crown. Dale's bought it—gave me twelve shillings for it; how he'll bring it up I'm sure I can't tell. Perhaps, Master John, you can go and teach him; may be you'll be as clever at that as soling boots, or driving pigs from market."

John pretended not to hear this remark of Tim's, but it had the effect of silencing him till they reached Old Cross, when, leaving Tim to buy his potatoes, he went strolling round the market with his hands in his pockets, looking out for a safe investment for his half-crown.

"I should have liked to have had that calf," he said; "I've my own notion that something might be done with

it. But that Dale is sure to make a mess of the thing; whatever should a man that deals in rags and bones know about live stock? Hallo! there he is, and the calf, I do believe, with him!"

It really was so. There stood Mr. Dale with the calf in his cart, and he appeared to be looking out for a purchaser. He had taken it home, and Mrs. Dale was furious at the sight of his bargain when he showed it to her. What was she to do with it? she asked. Hadn't she half-a-dozen children to see to, and two of them scarcely able to run alone, and what was she to do with a creature that would be ten times the trouble of a baby, and how on earth could she afford to bring it up with milk at fivepence a quart? The end of it all was that Mr. Dale had to put the calf in the cart, and take it to Old Cross, and there he stood now, hoping that some one would take it off his hands. He was quite willing to dispose of it for a much lower price than he had paid; but time went on, and he began to doubt whether he should not have to take the calf back again, in which case he knew not how he should face his wife.

Tim had bought his potatoes, and came up to Mr. Dale.

"You're in a hurry to make a penny by your bargain Had many bidders?"

Dale shook his head. "My missis don't like the trouble of bringing up the creature. If you'll take it back I'm willing to lose half-a-crown upon it."

"Thank ye," said Tim, "I'm very well content to let

matters stand as they are. My master told me to sell a calf, and not to bring one back, and I don't know what he'd say to me if I did."

"And I don't know what my missis will say to me if I don't get rid of this creature," replied Dale ruefully. "Couldn't you take it back at five shillings, Tim?"

"It won't do to take it back at all," replied Tim; "a sack of potatoes was all I was told to carry home from Old Cross. Come, Master John, it's time we were getting home."

"I'd rather stay a little longer here and walk," replied John, turning his half-crown over in his pocket. "I'm in no hurry, Tim; besides, I haven't spent my money yet."

"See if Dale will let you have his calf for it," cried Tim, driving off.

John looked at the calf. It was a very pretty creature. He stroked its head, and examined it much in the same manner that Mr. Dale had done, and then said, "Now what is the lowest, the very lowest, that you'll take for it?"

"Well, it's worth five times the money, but we'll say four-and-six for it," replied Dale. "It's only on account of my missis, or I'd never let it go for that."

"I'll give you half-a-crown, and it's all I've got," said John; "if you like to take that, and drive me back to Shedley along with the calf, I'll say done."

"So will I," said Mr. Dale; "I daren't face my missis with the creature. Jump in, for its time I was back to dinner."

Mr. Dale drove John up to the door of his mother's house, then he lowered the calf very carefully, and John, half leading, half carrying the animal, went straight to the kitchen where Martha was just preparing to dish up the dinner.

"Goodness me, Master John, whatever have you got there!" she exclaimed.

"It's a calf," said John, gravely; but Martha might have seen that for herself. "And I want you to help me bring it up by hand; I've got an 'idea."

"Oh, dear me, Master John, don't talk of your 'ideas;' whenever you do I know there'll be some mischief come of it. Take this creature away. Lor' a'mercy! if it isn't a drinking of the melted butter! Now it's got its foot in the bread-pan, Master John! If you don't take it away directly, I'll put on my bonnet and leave the place, long as I've been in it. I never engaged to serve in a cowhouse."

The calf had upset the butter-boat, and was trying to lap up the fluid, which scalded its nose, and one of its feet was in the dough, which was rising near the fire. It looked round feebly and helplessly as if seeking for its mother, and wondering what strange chance had brought it into such a place. John picked up the butter-boat, took the calf's foot out of the dough, and wiped its nose with his handkerchief; then he said to Martha—

"Now, it's no good getting into a wax; we must make this creature comfortable now we've got it. Let's put it in the wood-house. There's plenty of room for it there, and

after dinner I'll come and cook its food. No, Martha, you needn't look like that; you can't get its food ready. You don't suppose I'd trust you with it. You're all very well in your way—and those dumplings look first-rate—but as to doing anything beyond getting the saucepan ready for me to make the calf's broth in, and stirring it while I'm cooking, I really don't think, Martha, you're competent."

"Get out of my kitchen, do!" cried Martha, highly incensed at John's estimate of her capabilities; "and take that rubbishing calf along with you. There's Master Bob come to see you, and I know he wants his dinner; you've kept him waiting long enough, with your nonsense. Missis has gone to her mother's to stop the day; and I don't know what she'll say when she hears of this last new piece o' nonsense. But there!" muttered Martha, in a lower tone, "she does spoil Master John at that rate, that it's no wonder the boy never knows what mischief to be up to."

John ran out to speak to his cousin, who was wanting his dinner, and wondering how long it would be before it was ready. Mrs. Ashdell had asked him to dinner, and to spend the afternoon with John, who would be dull, poor dear, if he were left all alone by himself, while she was away at her mother's. The old lady had been taken suddenly ill, and Mrs. Ashdell was not certain when she would return, and had been pleased that John should have his cousin with him on his holiday, as she was obliged to be away herself.

"I've got the biggest bargain I ever bought in my life," cried John; "just you come and see him, Bob."

"What is it?" asked Bob; "a lop-eared rabbit?"

"Rabbit!" cried John, contemptuously; "as if I'd throw my money away upon that! When I've got a sum to lay out I like to do something sensible with it."

"Pouter pigeons, then?" asked Bob. "I saw a stunning pair the last time I was at Old Cross. I'd have asked the price, only I hadn't got any tin. Or is it guinea-pigs?"

"If you ain't the greatest flat, Bob, that ever was. What should I want with guinea-pigs? There's no eating them, and they ain't productive in other ways; and as to pigeons, they ruin one in peas. No, I've laid my money out in a rational manner this time: I've bought Uncle George's calf."

"His what?" asked Bob, with wide open eyes.

"His calf, stupid! Come along with me, and I'll show it to you, and you may help me put it away in the wood-house; it's in the kitchen now. Martha was in a precious fume when she saw it; but women never can be brought to see the sense of anything. Come along, do! Just hear how she's going on at the poor creature! But we must smooth her down a bit; I shall want her to let me have the saucepan on after dinner, to cook its food in."

"Oatmeal and skim-milk, I suppose?" asked Bob. "That's what I've heard Uncle George talk of bringing a calf up upon."

"You'll see," replied John, with a significant nod

'That's not the way I'm going to feed *my* calf. I've an 'idea' you may do it much cheaper than that. But you stop here, Bob, after dinner, and I'll let you help me."

The poor frightened calf was taken into the wood-house, and made as comfortable as circumstances permitted, after which Bob and John came to dinner, to which, though by this time it was nearly cold, they did ample justice. As soon as it was over, John said, "Now young one, we've got to see about that calf; we'll go at once to Uncle George's timber-yard, and get the stuff for its broth."

"He don't keep oatmeal there," cried Bob.

"Who said he did, stupid? Did I ever say I was going to give my calf such expensive stuff? I want to make it pay, which is a deal more than I should if I brought it up upon oatmeal. I've got an 'idea' that the right thing is sawdust."

"Sawdust!" cried Bob, opening his eyes wider than ever."

"Yes, sawdust; now what is there to stare at? I've been studying the chemistry of cooking lately; directing my attention to the concentration of nutritive substances." John had been getting up some hard words lately, and they impressed Bob wonderfully. "Now it stands to reason, don't it, that milk must be the very essence of vegetable matter—just as good strong beef tea is of beef?"

"Yes," replied Bob; "but sawdust isn't milk."

"Who said it was, ignoramus? but don't a tree draw its nourishment from the earth just as the grass does,

which feeds the cow that gives the milk. Well, isn't the wood of the tree its very essence? and don't the sawdust, which so many people throw away as if it was good for nothing, come from the wood, and if, by any chemical process, you can get the goodness out of that to feed the calf with, don't you get something analogous to, or closely resembling, the milk, which is the calf's natural food, only at a much less expense? Tell me that now, don't you see the thing as I put it, Bob?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Bob, doubtfully; "I shouldn't say it was very fattening, and won't it stick in the creature's throat? It must be rather choky stuff, you know, to swallow."

"Of course it would be if you gave it raw," replied John, smiling superciliously at Bob's ignorance. "But who's going to do that? I shall boil it down."

"Make it into pap?" asked Bob.

"Pap? No! It's milk I want. I shall extract the essence by a slow process of maceration—that's to say, boiling in a saucepan, if I can get Martha to lend me one—strain it off and give the decoction to the calf. It's only an experiment, but it's safe to succeed, and if it does I shall take out a patent. I think I shall call it *Aqua lignea.* I ought to make my fortune by it, for I'm convinced, Bob, that a pint of this, and a slice of bread, would give a fellow a better dinner than all the roast meat and dumplings we've just been having. I don't say it would taste just as well."

"I shouldn't think it would," observed Bob, looking anything but pleased at the prospect of sawdust broth and bread for dinner.

"But it would be quite as satisfying, and a great deal cheaper. Only think what a saving to families! It's my opinion I ought to be knighted, Bob, for making such a discovery. If Parliament does its duty I shall be, too; but I'm afraid I shall have some trouble in bringing them to see the sense of the thing."

"I'm afraid so, too," replied Bob.

"But, come along, now, and let's get the sawdust. I'm sure that poor thing must be half-starved by this time."

The two boys took a couple of cans with them, and proceeded to Uncle George's timber-yard. They filled them with sawdust, and then returned to John's home, where, after some persuasion, they induced Martha to lend them her largest saucepan for the purpose of boiling the sawdust in. She had done her work for the day, and now sat and watched them while they proceeded with their cookery, refusing, however, to have anything to do with it herself. John was a long time about it. "The process of maceration," he informed Bob, "was necessarily slow," and he wished to extract from the sawdust the full amount of nourishment it contained.

"It won't take long boiling to do *that*," said Martha, significantly; "for all the good it'll do the calf, you might as well give it the water without the sawdust in it, Master John."

"Don't mind her nonsense, Bob, but stir away," said John; "there never is any beating things into women. If you'd studied chemistry, Martha, which of course you haven't—"

"No, Master John, and for all the good your studying such like does you, I should say the less I had to do with it the better. Mercy me! the mess your making my clean kitchen in! I think you had better ask missis to let you have the copper to yourselves next time, and make your messes in the wash-house."

"That's a very good notion," replied John, gravely; "a copper is a much better thing to macerate in than a saucepan. But I think this will do now, Bob; let's turn it out, and go and feed the creature."

"Much the better it'll be for it!" said Martha, as John and Bob proceeded to the wood-house.

They had a little difficulty in persuading the calf to take its strange food, but at last they succeeded in getting it to swallow some, and leaving the rest for it to take when it pleased, they returned to the fire, and amused themselves the rest of the day with roasting chestnuts and telling riddles.

Mrs. Ashdell did not return home till John was in bed. Her mother was subject to sudden attacks of indisposition which generally passed away without alarming any one—even herself—but this had been more serious, and the doctor had been called in, and was to come again the next day. However, towards night the old lady felt so much

better that Mrs. Ashdell thought she might leave her with safety, and come home with the intention of returning to her mother's house the first thing the next morning.

She was so tired with her day's nursing and anxiety, that she was proceeding at once to bed when Martha informed her, with a very anxious face, that " Master John had been up to some of his tricks again."

"Well, I don't suppose they're very bad ones," said Mrs. Ashdell, fretfully; and you can tell me about them another time, Martha."

" Yes, but you ought to know of this at once, ma'am; I don't hold with tampering and petting dumb creatures as if they was so many Christians; still, I don't like to see a thing killed by inches under one's very nose, as it were."

"John wouldn't kill anything," said Mrs. Ashdell; he's the kindest-hearted boy—"

"Yes, but there's killing with kindness," retorted Martha, who had been quite long enough with her mistress to take the liberty of contradicting her occasionally; not but what starving's funny kindness, and if it isn't starving a creature to keep it on sawdust and water, I don't know what is."

" Whatever *are* you talking about, Martha?" said Mrs. Ashdell; "I wish you'd tell me what you mean and let me go to bed."

"Well, then, ma'am, Master John's trying to bring up a calf by hand upon broth made out of sawdust, and if that isn't starving I should like to know what is."

"Dear me, what a strange notion for the boy to take into his head; wherever could he have got that from! Well, Martha, I can't talk any more about it now, I really am so tired. You must look after the poor creature yourself, and if Master John won't give it anything but sawdust broth, you must. We can't have it starved, of course; that would be too shocking. There, do let me go to bed now and call me early in the morning. I must be at Mrs. Thorne's the first thing, and I'll talk to Master John about the calf when I've time, and you must look after it till I have."

Martha would have expostulated with her mistress on the ground that she had never undertaken to act as dry-nurse to a calf, but she looked at Mrs. Ashdell and saw she was tired out, and therefore carried up her candle-stick and helped her mistress into bed, much as she had done for Master John years ago, when he was a small boy, and, as she would have told you, not half the plague he was now, with his whims and his nonsense and his ever-lasting "ideas."

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE CALF ASTONISHED SEVERAL PEOPLE, AND MARTHA ASTONISHED THEM STILL MORE.

THE calf did not make quite so much progress as John had expected it would do. In fact it grew decidedly thin; thinner and thinner every day. John did not like altering his treatment of it, and thus owning that he had been mistaken in adopting it, but still he began to think that if things went on like this, he must adopt some other diet for the calf or else he should lose it altogether. He brought Bob to see it, and Bob gave it as his opinion that "it was in a bad way, and didn't seem to get on with the sawdust no how." Ted even condescended to look in, and he agreed with Bob; therefore, with some reluctance, John made up his mind the next morning to give the poor creature a little milk.

He could not bear to tell Martha the resolution at which he had arrived. "It would make her more conceited than ever," he said to himself, "and she was always going on now as if there was nobody in the world had got brains but herself." His mother had said nothing to him

about the calf as yet, her whole time and thoughts being taken up with Mrs. Thorne, who, though in no danger, still required great care and attention. But Martha had been very annoying in her questions respecting the calf's welfare, and her speculations as to what it would weigh by the end of the week; therefore, John was determined that if he had to bring up his calf upon milk instead of sawdust broth, Martha should know nothing of the change. He got up early the next morning and proceeded to a farm at some distance, where he obtained a bottle full of milk, and came back home with the intention of giving it to the calf as soon as breakfast was over. "It will take all my pocket-money, and a sight more than I'm ever likely to get," he thought, as he proceeded to the wood-house, "if this creature goes on like this; I must get rid of it, if it won't take the sawdust."

The calf was looking much better this morning, some of the sawdust broth, which John had left in a pail near it, was gone, and when he offered the milk, it refused to take any

"It's taken to the broth at last!" cried John, triumphantly; "got used to the taste of it, and likes it better than milk. I'll make sure, however, and try it again; I'll put this milk in a cool place and give it to the little creature again when I come home from school. I begin to have some hopes of it now. I've evidently overcome its natural inclinations, which of course must have been in favor of the milk. That's the first great step; all the rest will be easy work enough."

He went to school and told Bob he thought the calf was doing better. Bob walked home with him, when school was over, to see it, and was of the same opinion, indeed, he declared it had got fatter since last night. More of the sawdust broth had gone from the pail, and the calf again refused to partake of the mllk which John offered it There was no doubt whatever, both Bob and he agreed, that it had learned to prefer the artificial food to the natural. Not that Bob used such long words, he simply echoed John's, without troubling himself very much as to whether he understood their meaning or not.

"I shall want to make some more of it this evening," said John; "will you come and help me, Bob?"

Bob was quite willing, and as John said that all the goodness must have gone out of the last sawdust they had boiled, they went to Uncle George's timber-yard for some more as soon as afternoon school was finished, and after tea proceeded to their cooking.

Martha was very good-tempered this time, and lent them the saucepan and strainer without any demur, and even when John came after a third visit to his calf, and told her it was getting on famously, and would not touch the skim-milk which he had again offered it, and that it had quite emptied its pan of broth, she made no further manifestation of incredulity than a slight cough and a "La, now! wonders will never end. I'd go and tell all the farmers in the parish if I was you, Master John, of your new way of bringing up calves. What a saving it'll make in

milk and butter if they'll only try your new fashion! And won't sawdust go up? My! I should think your uncle ought to make his fortune as well as you at this rate, Mas ter John."

John was not quite sure whether Martha was in jest or earnest. There was a peculiar twinkle in her eyes, and a curious smile about the corners of her mouth, but still she was behaving in a much more agreeable manner than she was in the habit of doing when Master John was carrying out any of his notions, and there was no doubt that the calf was progressing well; so well that John thought that if it went on like this he would bring his uncle to see how well it was thriving under his new mode of treatment.

A whole week went on and still the calf was thriving; getting as stout and strong as if it had never left its mother. John's exultation knew no bounds; he brought Ted two or three times to see it, and even that superb young gentleman condescended to say he thought there must be something in it after all, though how there could be any goodness in sawdust was more than he could imagine.

John waited a week more before he proclaimed his success too openly, and then he could contain himself no longer, but went to see his uncle, and told him of the success of his experiment.

"You've fatted a calf with sawdust!" said Uncle George, looking incredulously at John.

"Haven't I!" replied John. "Just you come and see

him. He looks as well as ever a calf did, I can tell you, uncle."

"But you *don't* mean to tell me that he eats sawdust?" asked Uncle George.

"Bolts it like winkey," was the reply. "Well, not exactly the sawdust, but the water it's boiled in. It's a maceration, uncle, a process by which I obtain all the nutriment of the vegetable matter contained in the very pith of the tree."

"There, there, John! that'll do," said Uncle George, impatiently; "I don't understand one half you say, but it'll be a long time before you'll get me to believe that anything ever yet was nourished by sawdust. I'll come and see the poor creature though, before you've killed it outright, and the sooner the better, for it can't last long at this rate. A nice bag of bones I expect I shall find it."

"No, you won't, Uncle George; seeing's believing, and you'll find there's more goodness in sawdust than you thought for, when you look at my calf. I wish you'd bring Farmer Prowse with you too, when you come. He'll find I can bring my calves up cheaper than he can his."

"I'll bring him, never fear," replied Uncle George, "to look at this wonderful calf of yours. One is never too old to learn. It'll be something new to Prowse and me to learn how to bring a calf up upon sawdust."

John ran round to see Ted, and told him the calf was going on so well that his uncle and Farmer Prowse were coming round to see it, and as it would be a half-holiday

that afternoon, would Ted come too, and ask his father to accompany him. It was something to see a calf like that which had been fed upon nothing but sawdust. Ted promised to come and do his best to induce his father to do so too; and then John went off to school, feeling as if he had more brains to boast of as his own share than the master and all the boys put together.

School was over at last; it had seemed to John as if it would never come to an end, and then he ran home and took another look at his beloved calf. It looked fatter and sleeker than ever; a calf to be proud of. John patted and stroked it, and then went in to dinner, which he was too excited to eat; as soon as he had swallowed a few hasty mouthfuls, he ran to the garden gate, and looked out impatiently for his uncle and Mr. Harley.

Presently he saw Ted coming, accompanied by his father. Mr. Harley had been very incredulous as to the possibility of a calf being reared upon sawdust broth, but Ted had assured him that such really must be the case if John said so, as he invariably spoke nothing but the truth

"He's a queer fellow, I know, sir, and has all sorts of odd notions, but I never knew him to say a thing yet that he did not believe himself, and if he says this calf's got fat upon sawdust, why I'd rather believe that than I would that Ashdell's telling a story."

"It's quite impossible you know, Ted, that it really can be so," observed Mr. Harley, "there's some mystery or other about it."

"Well, I don't know, sir, they're always finding out fresh things," replied Ted, who had been led by John's boundless confidence in himself to have some belief in him too; "there may be something in this notion of Ashdell's after all."

"Ah! there *may*," said Mr. Harley, "but it will take a cleverer fellow than your friend, Ted, to get any good out of sawdust; if he succeeds in that, he'll raise sunbeams out of cucumbers."

They were soon at the gate of Mrs. Ashdell's cottage, and John, beaming with delight and triumph, led them to the wood-house and exhibited the calf. Whatever its food it certainly looked well, as Uncle George, who by this time had arrived with Mr. Prowse, owned. Bob had come too, and having assisted in the cooking of the sawdust, he took some of the credit of John's successful experiment to himself. Martha came to the wood-house and looked on, apparently as much pleased at the wonder Mr. Harley, Uncle George, and Farmer Prowse evinced as was John himself.

"You don't mean to tell *me*, John Ashdell," said the farmer, addressing John solemnly, "that this calf has had nothing since it left its mother but water you've boiled sawdust in."

"Aqua lignea, if you please, Mr. Prowse," said John gravely. "That's the name I give my decoction, but perhaps you don't understand Latin?"

"No, but I do understand common sense, young fellow, and it goes clean against that, for me to believe

that this animal has had nothing but your precious 'awker for the last fortnight."

"And I know it has not," said John, "not a thing, has it Martha?" he added, turning to that good dame who still stood smiling at the door of the wood-house.

"Not a thing," said Martha, "not a 'versal thing but three quarts of skim-milk well thickened with oatmeal that I've given it regular three times a day myself since the first two days Master John brought it here. Missus said it wasn't to be starved to please any of his whim whams, and if he would not feed it, I was to myself; so I took her at her word, and no one can say I haven't done my duty by the poor dumb creature."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW JOHN WAS SENT TO SCHOOL FOR HIS GOOD. HE OPENS HIS MOUTH, AND MAKES A GREAT MANY PEOPLE OPEN THEIR EYES.

JOHN was very glad to get rid of his calf after this. Farmer Prowse took it off his hands, and for some time any mention of sawdust was as unpleasant to John's feelings as an allusion to new ways of soling boots or carrying pigs home from market; still he could not bring himself yet to believe that there might be wiser people in the world than himself, and that all who lived in it before Master John Ashdell came, had not been so completely ignorant of the very first principles of knowledge as Master John had been accustomed to consider was the case.

"There's nothing for it," said Uncle George, "but boarding-school. The larger, the better. I should like to send him to a public one. The more boys he mixes with the more likely he is to have his nonsense thrashed out of him. 'I've an idea,' as Master John would say, that he'll go on like this till he has either killed himself or somebody else, if strict measures are not taken with him."

Still Mrs. Ashdell hesitated, she had a horror of boarding-schools, and a public boarding-school seemed most dreadful of all. But John himself condescended to approve of the notion; if a great boarding-school would not give him, like Alexander, another world to conquer, at any rate it would give him another world to listen to him. He was rather tired of his present school-fellows. They were mostly boys from the neighborhood, who had seen very little beyond it. The boys in a great school would have some "notion of things," said John, and be glad to know a fellow who could enlighten them a little. Some of them would come from London; some from great towns, and their views of matters would be likely to be altogether different from those of boys who have never stirred five miles from their native villages.

Perhaps John's arguments as to the utility of having a wide sphere for display—he put it modestly, "going to a place where people had sense enough of their own, not to be envious of a fellow who might happen to have just a little more,"—would not have had much effect upon his mother, had it not been for Master John distinguishing himself, after his own fashion, in a manner that frightened her. He got one of Uncle George's guns and fired it after "an idea" of his own, and though luckily there was only powder in it, he blackened his own face in a style that frightened Mrs. Ashdell and did some damage to the gun, which made Uncle George so angry that he in his turn, frightened Master John by threatening him with a sound

flogging if he ever found him meddling with anything of his again. John's dignity was affronted, so he sulked for at least a week with his uncle and kept away from the place, at which Uncle George was not at all sorry, as he was heartily tired of John and his "ideas." Then John struck up an acquaintance with a stoker on the railway and came home to his mother full of this new friendship There was one very good thing about the boy, nuisance as he was, he was so fond of his mother, and so frank and open with her. He told her all about his acquaintance with Joe Tims, and the manner in which he had astonished Joe by telling him of several improvements that he thought might be made in the locomotives, and intimated that he hoped before long Joe Tims would give him a ride up to London, when perhaps he might have an opportunity of showing him how to put the extra speed on when needed and get the passengers up to London almost before they thought they were half way.

"If I could only get hold of the engine-driver," said John, "I've got an idea how a collision might always be prevented by shunting the trains off, just as you'd turn a horse on one side. You make a safety-valve to throw off the steam, and an extinguisher to put out the fire with I've been making some drawings of them which I should like to show him, it would cost me something to get the real articles made, but if he'd promise me to let me have a chance of trying them I wouldn't mind that. I've got the price of that calf; what a shame it was of Martha not to

let me carry out that experiment properly! People always do seem so spiteful. They won't give one a chance. I should like to know how all the fellows that were the first to think of anything new would have got on, if they had been snubbed and sat down upon as I have been. However, I've sold the calf for a good bit more than I gave for it, and now I've got such chums with Joe Tims, I think I can see my way to something better than fattening animals; perhaps when I've time, and have made my way, I'll turn my attention to that again, and do things on a larger scale. Catch me ever letting Martha near my place then!"

Mrs. Ashdell was horrified at the thought of John carrying out his idea of shunting and letting the steam off and on, and sending a whole railway-train, luggage, passengers, stokers, drivers, and his precious self as well, to destruction. She went to Uncle George for advice, and he repeated that which he had all along given her. "Send him to school; he'll kill himself next if you don't, and half-a-dozen people besides. Know more than a stoker or an engine-driver, does he! Why, according to him, he knows more than every engineer in the kingdom. Manage a railway-train! Why he's capable of managing a kingdom in his own opinion. There's nothing for it but to send him to a boys' school, where, if the master doesn't thrash the nonsense out of him, the boys will."

Mrs. Ashdell shuddered at the idea of the thrashing, but the remembrance of John's readiness to go, reassured

her a little. "The dear boy thinks he would like it himself," she said timidly. "Not the flogging, you know, but I don't believe there's much of that now-a-days, but the society and the having boys of a more intelligent class to associate with—it certainly would be pleasanter for him."

"I hope he'll find it so," said Uncle George gravely.

"And where should you advise me to send him?" asked Mrs. Ashdell.

"To Bessingham Middle-Class Grammar School," said Uncle George, "that's where I'm going to send my own boys when they're old enough to go. Uncle Tummer knows it well and was educated there. I've always heard him speak well of it and by all accounts it's none the worse for the thirty years that have passed since then."

Uncle Tummer was Mrs. Ashdell's uncle, and a great authority in the family, though they did not see very much of him. I shall have more to tell you of him by-and-bye, "I think I'll write to Uncle Tummer and ask him about it," said Mrs. Ashdell.

"You haven't much time, the school opens for the summer term next week," said Uncle George; "you'd better be seeing about getting John's boxes ready."

"Then I'll go and ask John about it," said Mrs. Ash dell.

John was full of delight at the idea of going. "Bessingham Grammar School! I've always heard that well spoken of. I believe the Master's a very good fellow," he said patronizingly; don't go in too much for that old Latin

and Greek. Dear me! what a deal those ancients had to find out to be sure! I shall like to go very much indeed, mother. I wish Cousin Bob was coming too, but I dare say I shall find a friend or two of my own way of thinking."

John had quite enough to do for the ensuing week without getting into any new mischief. He packed up his conjuring tricks—some day he was going to make a new set of his own, and when he did, neither Houdin, nor the Wizard of the North could be compared to him. He put up his books, of which, besides those required for his studies, he had a very good assortment for a boy of his age. He said sometimes, "I don't go very much by books, but we may learn a thing or two now and then from them," His aunt made him a great cake, and Martha another. He had one small hamper of oranges and nuts, besides some pots of jam, two bottles of ginger wine, and a jar of preserved ginger. The village tailor made him a new suit of clothes, and his mother gave him his grandfather's gold watch and a little gold chain. He was to have his father's watch when he was one-and-twenty. Altogether, John was as well equipped for school as any boy need be, and started off in excellent spirits.

The school was not on the same line of railway on which Shedley was situated, so John had to come up to London in order to proceed there. Uncle George, who had business in town, volunteered to bring him, and Mrs. Ashdell, after a tearful leave-taking of her boy, went to the house of her mother who was again requiring a great

deal of attention from her. John had very little to say to his uncle on the way up. He never could bring Uncle George over to his "ideas," and they passed the journey to town in almost unbroken silence, Uncle George reading his paper, and John looking out of the window, and thinking how much better he could manage everything he saw around him, including digging the ditches and pruning the hedges.

Uncle George evinced some sense of his duties of an uncle, however, when he got his nephew up to London. There was no time for sight-seeing or for a regular dinner, but he took John to a pastry-cook's, where he gave him such a lunch as John had not often partaken of before. Of course John couldn't eat it without letting his uncle know how he could have improved upon the pastry, but Uncle George bore with him patiently now. "He'll soon have this taken out of him," he thought, as he walked out of the shop followed by John.

When they got to the station (I'm not going to tell you which station it was, as I don't want you to identity Bessingham School with any one grammar-school in particular) they found the platform alive with boys of different ages, from little fellows of nine, who had just succeeded in persuading their mothers to let them leave off knickerbockers as too childish for a public school, to tall, stout lads of seventeen or eighteen, some with their upper lips and cheeks already dark with the promise of coming mustaches and whiskers. An open third-class carriage had

been chartered for their conveyance as they would thus be all together, which the boys considered a much pleasanter arrangement than being shut up in small compartments in the second-class. As to travelling first-class, not one of them would ever have thought of it, unless he was coming home invalided, or going down with his parents. A railway platform is always a noisy place, but you should have heard the noise to-day! Every boy seemed to think it incumbent on him to talk enough for half-a-dozen, with the exception of one or two of the seniors who, perhaps, had come with their mothers and sisters, and were rather languid, and grand, and supercilious, and, in fact, as some of the younger ones said, were giving themselves "no end of airs."

The little ones, who had come with their mothers or fathers, tried to look brave and talk louder than anybody, as if they wanted everybody to believe that going to school was the pleasantest thing that could happen to them, and, of the two, decidedly pleasanter than going away from it. Perhaps the boys who are neither very big nor very small were the merriest and the most at their ease; they had no dignity to sustain like their seniors, and the great world of school had become by this time more familiar to them than it had to those younger ones who had been so short a time in it. There were about thirty of them altogether; of course there were a great many more in the school, but these were boys who lived in London, or like John, had had to come through it from another part of the country

John kept very qu et (for him) and looked about him while Uncle George saw to the safe bestowal of his luggage along with the other boxes of his travelling companion. Then John got in, and his place happened to be right in the very centre of the carriage, for which he was not altogether sorry, as it gave him a good opportunity of seeing his new school-fellows. There was a little bustle about getting places, a great deal of hand-shaking, and some kissing amongst the juniors, then the steam-engine gave its long, shrill whistle, and amidst the waving of handkerchiefs, the good-bys of mammas and papas, the hurrahs of small brothers, the shouts and cheers of the school-boys themselves, away went the train, and John was fairly embarked on his new life.

"I hope he'll come back a rational being," said Uncle George. "If Bessingham doesn't cure him, I don't know of any place that will, short of a lunatic asylum."

They had fifty miles before them, and the train was only going sixteen miles an hour, so John had plenty of time before him, and he leaned back quite at his ease, to make his observation. Another boy might have been shy or timid with such a circle of new companions, but John never had any feelings of that nature, he was so thoroughly confident and self-possessed, so perfectly sure that everything he, John Ashdell, did was just the wisest, best, discreetest thing that could be done. There was a tall boy, one of the seniors of the school, just opposite him, and he looked at John with a little curiosity, then

turned to a small, meek-faced lad by him and said, "Are you Miles's brother?"

The little fellow said, rather timidly, "Yes, sir." It was his first term at school, and the boy who spoke to him was so very big, and had such a deep bass voice, and such an imposing manner, that little Miles was not at all sure that he was not speaking to one of the masters, who was going down with the boys to see that they didn't misbehave themselves.

"Miles's brother, I mean, who got the Exhibition?" said the big boy.

"Yes, sir," said the little one with a flush of pride, and the other boys leaned forward and looked at him. Miles's brother was somebody. Miles had done the school credit, and they were all a little proud of him, and disposed to treat his small brother very well. John, who was quite tired of keeping silence, now broke in with—

"What did he get it for?"

"Latin and Greek," said the little boy, Miles's brother. "Classics," said the big one who had been Miles's friend, superciliously, as if he wondered at the impertinence of a new fellow, who, from his age, could only be expected to enter the fourth form, entering into any conversation in which he was taking part.

"Classics," said John; "oh! I don't care much about them."

"Don't you?" said Miles's friend in his grandest tone. "It's rather curious, isn't it, you're coming to a grammar-school then?"

He thought of putting the strange boy down. If he had only known him a little better he might have spared himself the trouble. John stretched out his legs, made himself as comfortable as his seat permitted, and seeing that he was likely to have an attentive audience, went on.

"Latin and Greek are all very well, but I don't think so much of them myself as some people do; Mathematics are the thing I'm going in for, though I don't consider Euclid always goes the right way to work. I should like to have a little talk with him about some of his problems; I've got 'an idea' I could have put him up to a thing or two."

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell the head-master as much," said Miles's friend, while Miles's brother and every other small boy, and a good many who were not very small, opened their eyes and listened with wondering silence to this audacious new boy, who seemed not to be afraid of the great sixth-form boy opposite, who was perhaps as much astonished as any of them.

"Shouldn't mind when I get to know him better. I hope he's up to a thing or two. Don't want to stick too much to the old rules, does he? I've heard he goes in for chemistry, geology, and a lot of other things of that kind, and a master that does that, isn't likely to be bound down just to 'hic, hæc, hoc,' or the declensions and conjugations of a lot of verbs, that after all, no one on earth was ever the better for knowing. I don't suppose those

old Romans or Greeks either, bothered their heads half so much about their grammar as we do now-a-days."

"*You'll* be bound down pretty stiffly, I can tell you," said Miles's friend. "I wonder, if you know so much, that you trouble your head about coming to school at all. What sort of a place have you been in before?"

"Well, I was only a day-boy there. We were all day-boys. It was rather an old-fashioned place, and the master, in my opinion, was decidedly behind the times. Still I got on pretty comfortably. I didn't see anything of him out of school hours; the worst of him was that *in* school hours he was always down upon a fellow for talking; one couldn't make the simplest remark without catching it. How this train jolts. I wonder they don't think of some way of preventing it."

"I should think you might tell them how to do it," said Miles's friend grimly; "such an universal genius as you appear to be, ought to be able to think of something to hinder the shaking of a train."

"Well, I've got an 'idea' that I could," said John, "I've a friend who's on the railway, and I was telling him my views of the matter, and he really seemed to think there was something in them."

John was a good, honest boy, and not troubled with many ideas of his own personal consequence, apart from his own great cleverness, but Miles's friend looked so very grand, that he felt hardly disposed to say that *his* friend was a stoker, so that the other seemed to have imbibed the

idea that John was speaking of a director or some other leading magnate, for with a little more blandness in his tone he said, "Is your friend a practical man?"

"Oh! he's practical, very practical," said John, "and he promised to introduce me to another who knows even more of the working of such matters than he does. I must look them both up when I go home for the holidays, and in the mean time study the thing a little. I've got an 'idea,' you know, that if we were to cover the rails with a thick bedding or coating of india-rubber—"

"India-rubber!" There was a general outcry at this.

"India-rubber," said John gravely. "There you get the desired elasticity, which prevents the horrible bumping we're undergoing just now. You'd go as smooth and as nice as a sledge over snow."

"But how would it wear?" said Miles's friend, who began to think there was something in the new boy after all. John's evident belief in himself, his profound conviction that what he was saying was the best and wisest thing that could be said, was beginning to affect even him. As he listened with some show of politeness, of course the other boys did the same, and John was in his element, with a whole carriage-full of attentive auditors. This was something worth coming to school for. "I've got amongst the right set at last," thought John, and he leaned back, crossed his arms, and went on talking more fluently than ever.

"Safe to wear, you know; look at the wear of an india-rubber ball, and very easy to renew. You make the cover-

ing in lengths, which can be put down in a very few minutes. Or you might pour it on melted. I don't know but what that would be the best way. What should you say now?"

"Can't tell, I'm sure. Haven't studied the subject. If it's all the same to you just mind where you're putting your feet. You keep digging them into my bag," said Miles's friend.

"Very sorry; didn't see it," said John looking down at a great black leather bag which he had been making use of as a footstool. "Hope there's nothing in it I've hurt?"

"Only oranges, and I don't want them made into jam."

"That's a good notion," said John. "Never thought of that before. Why shouldn't we make jam as we do wine; tread on the fruit till it's all in a mash, then stir in the sugar, beat it all up together, and put it in the pots and cover it over. It would be a very quick way and save no end of paring."

"Rather nasty," said Miles's friend.

"Well, perhaps it is when you come to think of it," said John, "but still something might be made out of the 'idea.'"

"I'd rather stick to the india-rubber rails," said another sixth-form boy, rather superciliously, "I wonder Stephenson and Brunel never thought of them."

"So do I," said John, "but Rome wasn't built in a day, and there is a deal to be found out yet, if people will only go the right way to find it. I wish they'd pad the backs

of the carriages; what with the bumping and shaking, and the hard backs and seats, I feel stiff and sore all over."

"Why didn't you bring an air cushion or two?" said the sixth-form boy who had last spoken.

"Didn't think of it—besides I haven't got any," said John, frankly; but I've got 'an idea!' Why shouldn't caps be made to serve as air cushions or pillows. That's a capital notion. You take off your cap, you blow away, and there you are—nothing to do but to fix it behind you anywhere and lay down upon it—dear me! if that were only carried out, one might turn all one's clothes into air cushions, so that one could carry one's bed wherever one went—nothing to do but to take off one's things, inflate them, and then turn in. What a capital notion, now, for a fellow in the back-woods! Why he need never be without a bed to lie down upon."

"Nor without a pair of bellows either," said the sixth-form boy who had last spoken, and whose name was Staples; "if he's willing to turn himself into one!"

John looked at him rather disdainfully and made up his mind that he should not get on with him too well. "Envious pig!" he thought. "Can't bear to see another fellow with more brains than himself." Then, feeling rather tired, and dry in the throat, after speaking so much, he took out one of his juiciest oranges and began eating it, and so the time went on till the train stopped at Bessingham.

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CHAPTER IX.

HOW JOHN GOT ON AT SCHOOL. HE DOES NOT FIND THE BOYS QUITE AS SENSIBLE AS HE EXPECTED THEY WOULD BE. AN OLD COUPLE AND AN OLD BOOK.

BESSINGHAM Grammar-School was an imposing old place. It had been built in the reign of Edward the Sixth, and in its great hall there was a dim old portrait of a quiet-looking boy, said to be that poor little monarch. There was accommodation in it for above a hundred boys, besides a good house for the head-master. It was built of red brick, and had all sorts of gables, queer-shaped windows, and chimneys up which the ivy twisted. The rooms inside were dark and low, and there were long rambling passages, which led no one knew whither, seeming to have been built for the sake of giving as much exercise to the boys and servants as possible. But it was a comfortable old place withal, and some modern improvements having been introduced in the way of ventilation and warmth, the school-buildings, old as they were, formed a very snug abiding-place for the boys who occupied them. The master was popular. He was a pleasant, cheery-looking man of forty-five, tall and portly, with the character of being

an excellent classic scholar, and at the same time anxious to keep his school well up to the modern standard, which requires that education should consist of a great many things besides Latin and Greek. He shook each boy heartily by the hand as he entered, and had a word or two to say to all. John's heart turned to him at once. "I like the look of that Doctor," he thought; "I should say that's a man with some sense in him. But whatever does he go on living in this old-world place for? Why doesn't he get the Town Council, or the Town, or whatever it is that has the management of matters, to build a new school? This seems so dreadfully out of date. I don't know how a fellow can be expected to keep up with the times, when he's in a place that's three hundred years behind them."

John got on very well with his lessons. He was clever and quick, and they never gave him much trouble. Most of the masters liked him, too. John was always well behaved and polite; a good tempered gentlemanly boy, to whom most people's hearts turned at once, until he had carried some freak or other too far. Dr. Raven, the head-master, was very well pleased with him, but thought him rather peculiar, having overheard him once or twice dilating on some of his pet theories to his school-fellows; and he resolved to become a little better acquainted with him as soon as the school had settled down again into thorough working order; but just at first he had too much to do to devote himself to any one boy in particular.

The one great thing John did not like about the school

was its regularity. He had always been pretty punctual in his attendance at school, but he had had a great deal of liberty allowed him after school hours; then he had had his own little room, or laboratory as he called it, where he could carry out his experiments undisturbed. Of course he had nothing of the kind at Bessingham, and though, like other boys above the third form, he was allowed to go out alone occasionally, still he had to be back at stated hours, and any infringement of this rule the Doctor punished severely.

John did not like this. It was putting fetters on the wings of his genius. He could always think better when out for a walk, and to have his meditations cut short, or their current diverted, by the reflection that he had to be back by a certain hour, was very unpleasant. "One can't follow out a train of thought," he said to Hooke, a fourth-form boy, whom he had converted into a great admirer, "if one remembers that one is bound to be in to dinner or study hour at a fixed time. I like the Doctor, but I wish I could get him to see that such strict regularity is not altogether desirable. What's dinner, when one's just on the point of making a great discovery, that one should hurry back, and send one's meditations to the winds, just that one's mutton may not be overcooked, or the boiled beef get cold. Dinner indeed! I often wish, when I hear that great bell ringing the quarter of an hour's notice, that there was not such a thing as dinner in the world."

"I don't!" said Hooke, solemnly. He was a round,

pudding-faced boy, and brought his words out with great slowness and deliberation.

"I know what I do wish instead, and I should be very glad some day or other that you'd have an idea how that could be brought about."

"Well what is it?" said John, patronizingly. "Speak out—perhaps I may manage it for you."

"That there could be two dinners every day!" cried Hooke, enthusiastically. "My! wouldn't that be worth coming to school for."

John turned from his young admirer in disgust, but the feeling only lasted a moment. He could not afford to quarrel with him. Hooke's belief in and admiration of him were very precious. Miles's friend—whom I may as well introduce at once under his rightful name of Hart—was given to jeering, and satirized him a little, and Staples ridiculed him unmercifully. Master John was beginning to find out the difference between a large school and a small one; besides, there were many boys at Bessingham older than himself, while at Shedley they had all been of his own age, or younger. Hooke and a few others were overpowered by his flow of words, and the wonderful confidence he had in himself; but the generality of the boys were more influenced by Hart or Staples. And John liked to be believed in;—he might sneer at people and their stupidity, and say they were beneath his notice, but still he felt disheartened and vexed when he found every one disposed to treat him as Uncle George always did. So

he did not like to quarrel with Hooke, and very soon an opportunity occurred of testing how much that youth and some others believed in him.

There was a dingy little shop in Bessingham kept by an old man and his wife, who were themselves as great antiquities as the curiosities in which they dealt. They sold (whenever they got a customer, which was very rarely) old pictures, carved furniture, and curious books and china. John liked hanging about this shop—sometimes he got into a talk with the old man, who was almost as crotchety and peculiar as John. With the old woman he had very little to do as she was shy and timid, but Reuben Flint, when you came to know him, had a great deal to say for himself, or rather for those things in which he especially delighted, and on the whole John considered him rather a desirable acquaintance.

Reuben liked John, because of all the Grammar-School boys he was the only one who never ridiculed him. John was certainly a good-hearted boy, and would not have thought any old man a fit person to be made the subject of jokes; but he really thought Reuben a very clever fellow. "There's a great deal in that old man," he said to Hooke; "I believe he knows a great deal more than people give him credit for. I don't say just your Latin and Greek, but they're not the only things worth knowing in the world. Do you know, since I've seen him I've learned a thing or two that I never dreamed of before."

And then John looked astounded, as if it were some-

thing almost incredible that there should be any one found capable of teaching Master John Ashdell more than he knew already.

One half-holiday John went to see his friend Reuben. He found him sitting in the back-parlor with a great old book upon his knees. His wife opposite him was stirring a pot that hung over the fire, in which she was concocting some broth, that had not a particularly appetizing savor. As John looked at her—so old, so wrinkled, so dirty, and so ugly—he thought of the stories he had read of witches and their decoctions. The back parlor itself was just the scene for a witch and a wizard to dwell in. A great stuffed crocodile was slung across the ceiling. In one recess of the room was a curiously carved chest, at least three hundred years old, and it was adorned with death's heads and cross-bones among other devices, so that being quite black with age and worm-eaten as well, it had not the most cheerful appearance. Some old armor—shields and breastplates—hung on the walls, and in one corner was a skeleton, said to be that of a famous robber of Charles the Second's time. Reuben Flint had a mania for buying, no matter whether he was likely to sell again or not. Indeed he was very much richer than from his style of living and appearance anyone would have imagined; but he was fond of hoarding, and could not bear to part with his money, unless for some curious or antique acquisition. He was miserly in all but that; perhaps, indeed, the accumulated treasures around him were only signs of

miserliness taking another form. He generally contrived to secure them cheaply, but even when he had a good offer for any one of his possessions, he seemed to find it hard to part with it.

He was so wrapped up in his book that he did not at first hear John, who sat quietly down on one of the three chairs in the room—all of which with the table, were supposed to be as old as the time of Queen Elizabeth—and looked at the old couple, and thought what strange-looking creatures they were, possibly wondering, as boys sometimes do, whether he could ever be as aged and as wrinkled and as feeble, as the old man before him. Mrs. Flint was the first to see him, but she stirred her broth, and said nothing. It was believed that she never did speak above half-a-dozen words a day, so that it was hardly likely she would have one of the six to spare for him. Presently Reuben raised his eyes, and fixed them on John without speaking. It was such a set, steady stare, almost as if he were seeing something right beyond John, that Teddy Hooke, who had come with his friend, was rather frightened, and creeping up to the other said, "I say, I wish you'd hook it. The old chap looks uncommonly queer."

Reuben closed the book. It was written in what they call Black Letter, and bound in brown vellum, with great brass clasps. Then he gave a sigh, and rising up, placed it almost reverently on the top of the great chest with the death's-heads, and coming back to his chair sat down, and

looking at John said, "That's a wonderful book, and he was a wonderful man that wrote it."

"Who was he?" asked John, "and what's it about?"

"The greatest art of all—the art of making gold!" said Reuben, and his eyes fairly sparkled as he spoke. "What a man! What a man to know! If he were only living now, that one might see and speak to him—learn a little more of what he tells us in that wonderful volume!"

"Making gold!" said John. "Well, I've heard of that, but I never believed in it."

"I suppose he went to the diggings," said Teddy Hooke, and John turned from him with contempt. "I shouldn't wonder," he said to Reuben, "but that there was something in that notion. I've got an 'idea' that we might make gold, if we gave our attention to the matter. I should like to look at that book. Would you mind lending it to me?"

Reuben shook his head. "It would come back in a pretty state if once I let it go to your school; but you're a good lad, and have got more sense in you than a great many. You may come here and read it at odd times."

"May I stop now and look at it?" asked John, eagerly. "I needn't be back for these two hours. Do let me stop."

"You—you don't want me to keep here too?" asked Teddy, looking timid. "I'd rather get back to football."

"No, I don't want you," answered John. "I shall be best quiet. Run along with you, and don't tell any of the

fellows where I am. I don't wish for any of their remarks."

Teddy went away very well pleased to get out of the gloom, and away from the skeleton and dingy possessions of Reuben Flint, to the light and the fresh spring air. John sat down, and was silent—with the exception of an occasional burst of admiration, or an exclamation of wonder—for the full two hours that he had allowed himself; then he went out, thanking Reuben Flint with much gravity for having allowed him to see the book, and passed the rest of the evening in unusual silence; though, to judge by the manner in which his lessons and themes were prepared, his work was very little the better for this very remarkable taciturnity.

CHAPTER X.

A JOINT-STOCK CONCERN. HOW JOHN SETS HIS POT BOILING.

THE next day when school was over, John went to Teddy Hooke, and said he should like to take a stroll with him as far as the Castle. This was within the bounds in which the boys were allowed to roam by themselves, and Teddy being ready, off the two started. Bessingham Castle had been a grand old place in its time, and its ruins were massive and imposing. The walls were of an enormous thickness, and the stonework of several of the towers was still nearly perfect. There were subterranean vaults, which common-place people said had been used for the storage of fuel, and those of more exalted imaginations, like John, believed to have been either prisons or hiding-places in the time of danger. John had very often wandered about the Castle, thinking how much better he could have built it, and how, if he had been living at the time, and the construction of Bessingham Castle had been left to him, he would have taken care that it should have as much light and ventilation as any modern mansion, and

yet have been so strongly built, that cannon-shot should have no more effect upon it than so many peas from a pea-shooter. Perhaps Teddy thought he was going to hear something like this to-day, for he came out provided with a pocketful of biscuits, that he might have something to employ himself on while listening to John's remarks Teddy was a wonderful boy for eating—perhaps that was one reason he was so good a listener. He couldn't well talk when his mouth was full of fruit or cakes.

John walked on silently through the one street of the quiet old town, which, if it had not been for the Grammar-School boys, would have seemed to have gone to sleep for ever; through the winding path which led by the Church—which was as old as the town; and the church-yard, which was very little quieter, and so on to the rising ground where stood Bessingham Castle, looking over a wide expanse of meadow and corn-field, with trees now green with their early foliage, and hedges white and fragrant with hawthorn-blossoms.

They passed through the great court-yard and sat down outside, leaning against the ruins of what had once been an outer wall. John looked carefully around him to see that no one was near enough to hear what he was about to say; and, having satisfied himself that he was perfectly safe, began solemnly—

"Hooke, I've been thinking."

Teddy took the biscuit which he was just about to bite, away from his mouth, and said gravely—

"You mostly are. I wonder how your brains stand it. What's up now?"

"I lay awake half last night thinking about that book that Flint showed me," answered John. "I'm satisfied there's more to be done in that way than he, or any one else but just myself, has a notion of. Only think of it! Make our fortunes! Just to be as rich as a dozen Lord Mayors melted into one, and every King in the world into the bargain."

"How are you going to do it?" asked Teddy.

"Well, I've got an 'idea' or two about that, but one wants a little time to settle matters, and we shall need a few things to go to work with. How are you off for pocket-money, Hooke?"

"Spent all I've brought, and my last week's allowance," answered Teddy. "I shall have sixpence next Saturday, but I don't see how I can spare it. You don't want to borrow it, do you?"

"Well, sixpence wouldn't be much help, or else I might have put you in the way of making your fortune. I'm pretty well off; I've had nothing much to spend mine on since I came down here."

"No, you don't care for grub," said Teddy. "No wonder the other fellows say you're so odd."

"I like to spend money sensibly," said John, in his grandest tone, "and do something with it. What's the good of throwing it away on cakes and lollipops? Not that I mean to hurt your feelings, Hooke. I suppose you

can't help being so fond of eating. But you're a good fel· low, and I think you've got more brains than people credit you with; and though you haven't got any money to put into the concern, I don't mind making your fortune. I' isn't much to do while one's about it," John continued, in his loftiest tone. "But don't you think any of the others have got some tin? We must have some, you know. We can't make gold without."

"There's Staples," replied Teddy; "he's always got a lot."

"Oh! I don't want to have anything to do with Staples. He's one of those who thinks no one has a grain of sense but themselves. Indeed, I don't like the sixth form altogether. They're an envious lot—don't seem as if they could forgive a fellow having more brains than they have. No, I'll have nothing to do with any of them. But I think there's little Rodwell, and Grosse; and young Miles—if he'll only leave off talking about his brother—I'll let him in. It'll be a first-rate chance for him," added John, good naturedly. "I don't think his people are very well off Well, they might put in what little they've got. I'll throw in all mine, and I expect I've as much as the rest of them put together; and will take you in for nothing, if you give your services. You shall be secretary, and paid with a share of the profits. Then you'll have to keep accounts, and we'll share out according to what we put in. Of course I shall have the most, but then I shall put the most in, besides originating the idea, so that'll be only fair you know."

Teddy nodded: "But what do you want money for, if you are going to make it?"

"Oh! you soft!" cried John, impatiently; "we can't make money, any more than anything else, out of nothing. We shall want a furnace and a crucible. I saw an earthen pot as I came through the town, that I think would be just the very thing. Then we shall want some chemicals. Look here, I've written them all down. I did it while old Flint had gone into the shop. I don't think I shall take him into the concern—it mightn't be so pleasant for you fellows. Indeed, I think if I had him in, he wouldn't come to work with you, and I think, you know, when a fellow is in a school," said John with an air of great magnanimity, "he ought to stick by it."

"But where shall we put the furnace?" asked Teddy. "I don't think the Doctor will give us leave to set it up anywhere about the school."

"I don't suppose he will," cried John; "and if he would, I shouldn't be such a flat as to set the thing up where all the fellows could see what was going on. I want to keep this to ourselves. There's no need to have all the school wanting to go shares with us, which they're safe to do when they find out what's going on. No; I've got an 'idea' we might find a snug little corner somewhere about this old place. There must be lots of odd nooks where we might set up a furnace, and nobody be the wiser. Of course it'll cost us something to buy it—that's what I want you all to club together for. But it won't be much, and I

vote we come next half-holiday and look about for a hiding place; and between this and then, we'll sound Rodwell and Grosse, and little Miles, and see if they're willing to go shares in the concern."

Teddy walked back to school very much puzzled, and yet a little elated. John showed him, as they went through the town, the earthen pot that he thought might be made to serve for a crucible. What a "crucible" was, Teddy Hooke had not the remotest idea, but altogether the notion of making gold seemed such a very fine one, that he volunteered to give up his next Saturday's sixpence towards the preliminary expenses. Little Miles, Grosse, and Rodwell were all three ready to join and club their funds together. Teddy Hooke was confirmed in his post of secretary—the duties consisting in keeping an account of the expenditure and the subsequent winnings. "And you just work well at your figures," said John; "for when we *do* begin making money, you'll find enough to do in keeping accounts!"

Next half-holiday, John went off quietly to the Castle to look for a suitable place for his furnace. He went alone, that he might not attract attention; and the boys who were in his confidence started off together, in order to have a little quiet talk about the wonders they expected John Ashdell would bring about for them.

The great things they were going to do! Little Miles said he would give his mother a pony-chaise, and his brother a room full of books. Grosse said he would have pony to himself, and a velocipede. Rodwell would be

content with nothing less than a hunter; while Teddy Hooke said that he would have macaroons for breakfast and plumcake for dinner every day of the week. They looked very mysterious and very wise, and walked about with a pleasant consciousness of their own importance the whole of the afternoon, while John was peering into every nook and corner of the Castle.

At last he met with an unexpected treasure. Down in one of the vaults or cellars, of which I have spoken, he came to what was certainly the remains of a stove, and in very fine order. John made up his mind at once that this must have been the furnace of some alchemist, who had fixed his quarters there in old times. In truth, it had been put in the Castle about half-a-century ago by an eccentric old man who chose to live rent-free, and had gained the nickname of Hincks the Miser. John looked well about by the light of the candle which he carried with him, and was satisfied that by a re-arrangement of the loose stones lying about, their alchemic operations might be carried on unmolested. The stove would want fixing a little tighter, and of course firewood and coke would have to be provided. "I should think they must have burned coke in those days," said John; "it seems just the right sort of thing for a stove like this. It never occurred to John that coke could hardly have been burnt in days when gas was unknown.

He was very much pleased with his discovery, but instead of going at once to inform his friends of it, he thought

he would rather have a little talk with Reuben Flint. "I said I would not have him in it at all, he thought, "but I don't know that it will be quite wise to leave him out. I shall want to look at that book every now and then, and he might put a little money in the concern, besides getting us some of the chemicals we're in want of. We might have him in as a sort of sleeping partner—take his share of the profits, but not meddle with the working of the affair—I'll go and see what he says to it."

Reuben Flint was rather astonished when he heard how much John had to say, but he shook his head hopelessly. "You'll do nothing with it—nothing. It's just what so many have sought and failed to find; but you may see the book, and I can tell you where to get some of the articles you want; indeed, I think I could let you have some of them myself. Come this way."

The old man led the way to the back of his shop, and opening a door, John followed him into a small closet fitted up with shelves, on which were ranged a number of different bottles, while below were small boxes or caskets. He looked at them sorrowfully and said, "It was a dear bargain when I bought these, but I thought something might be made of them when I did so."

Reuben Flint had been tempted some years ago to purchase the contents of a gentleman's laboratory, and had never yet found a customer for it. He had had at the time a fancy for dabbling a little in chemistry himself, but this had now passed away; he was quite ready to sell the

contents of some of the bottles to John, declining, however to give any other assistance.

"It'll just amuse you boys," he said, "and you may as well be doing that as breaking windows or tormenting cats. I'll let you, John, read the book for nothing, and you shall have any of the ingredients you require for what they cost me, only I hope you will not go blowing the old Castle to pieces, or burning off your own fingers."

"Don't be afraid—we'll take care of ourselves," said John. Then he inspected the bottles, and was too eager to possess himself of some of their contents to wait till the furnace was set up; therefore Reuben Flint made him up a parcel of each, and John found his way back to school with it.

The next half-holiday saw John and his friends at work in the vault of Bessingham Castle. They took off their jackets, turned up their shirt-sleeves, and worked like so many navvies. If they had only been set such a task as a punishment, how they would have rebelled against it! But they toiled on, placing the stove more firmly, and building up the loose stones that had fallen down at the entrance, so as only to leave a narrow opening wide enough for one of them to pass through at a time. This took them the whole of the afternoon, and therefore they had to defer commencing their experiments till the next half-holiday, when John announced his intention of beginning in earnest.

How anxiously the boys looked forward to the coming Wednesday! They counted every hour. They were to be

rich! rich!! rich!!! No amount of money won by sheer painful labor, or persevering exertion, would have been half so delightful in anticipation as the good fortune which was to come upon them—little Miles put it poetically and classically, as Jupiter did—in a shower of gold. Their heads were fairly turned, they could think of nothing but their coming wealth. As to their lessons, they were matters quite beneath their consideration—Teddy Hooke put it plainly, "What's the good of a fellow cramming down Greek and Latin, when he can get his own living just by making a pot boil?"

To which Grosse replied, "That's the only kind of cramming you ever object to, Hooke."

Dr. Raven saw that there was something amiss, and he remarked upon it to Mr. Vane, the second master. "Young Ashdell is a clever fellow, but I'm afraid he's at some nonsense or other, which has turned his own head and those of the other boys, too. I hope they'll not be up to mischief. Couldn't you give a hint to one or two of the sixth form to keep an eye upon them out of school hours?"

Mr. Vane promised to see what he could do, and the Doctor himself spoke to Staples: "I wish you'd look after that young Ashdell in a good-tempered way, without letting him see it. I like the boy, and I really think he might be a credit to the school if those precious 'ideas' of his don't run away with him. I should be obliged to you, Staples, if you would just see if you could keep him in check a little."

Staples, like Mr. Vane, promised to do what he could, but John and his friends went to work so quietly, that the slightest idea of what they really were after, never occurred to either of them. John went out quietly between hours on the Monday and Tuesday and laid in a stock of fuel, carrying it in a bag, which he slung over his shoulder under his Inverness-cape. It was late in the year to be wearing such a thing, but that was John's affair. Staples, who saw him going out with it, thought it might be one of his "ideas" that he was likely to catch cold if he did not wrap up well, and as John seemed as steady a boy as any in the school, the absurdity of the notion only seemed the more in keeping with his character.

John had a great many journeys to and from the Castle, but he went round-about ways to it, and sometimes entered it on one side, sometimes on the other, so that Staples—who really was anxious to please the Doctor, and keep John out of mischief, if possible, remarked to a schoolfellow "that there was nothing more peculiar in him than that he was rather fond of taking strolls with Teddy Hooke, who ought to act as lead to his quicksilver; for if Ashdell has more 'ideas' than he knows what to do with, the other has not one beyond getting a better pennyworth of cake or apples than anybody else.

Wednesday came at last, and, luckily for these promising boys of ours (who had already begun to suspect that Staples and "Weathercock"—which was their modification of Mr. Vane's name—were "spying" on them), Staples

went home for the day to see an uncle just returned from India, and Mr. Vane was laid up with a sore throat. The Doctor gave a caution about them just before dinner to a junior master, but they had left ere he was aware of it, and were within the Castle almost before he knew they had left the playground.

Then they set to work. John had provided candles as well as coke, and they were lit two at a time, and stuck in physic bottles, which, as he said, made capital candlesticks at a very cheap rate. They blocked the doorway pretty well up, moving the stones in front of it, that no glimmer of light should betray them; then to carry out the thing more fully, Grosse was set to keep watch with his eye at an aperture between the stones. John had suggested that he should walk up and down outside, and whistle if he saw any one approaching; but to this Grosse demurred, "he wanted to see what was going on as well as the rest, and if any of the fellows saw him outside they might smell a rat."

So John had to be content with stationing Grosse on his knees before the stones, and then he went busily to work, setting Miles to light the furnace, and Rodwell to stir the contents of the crucible, into which he poured the different ingredients with which Reuben Flint had supplied him.

I can't tell you what those boys felt while it was all going on. They thought of Guy Fawkes and his barrels of gunpowder under the Houses of Parliament, of coiners, and of wizards. They seemed themselves turned into something strange, and supernatural, and uncanny—each

one felt a little afraid even of himself, and a little more of every other boy who was there. John was the master-spirit amongst them all. They yielded at once to his ascendency, and as the fire burned in the stove, and threw a dull lurid light on the grey stone walls, mouldering with the damp of centuries, or on the creeping things that crawled beneath their feet or climbed up the walls, they felt as if they were taking part in some great mystery, and that John, the prime agent of all, was little less than a sorcerer.

"It's beginning to melt," said John as he looked into the pot, and even he, the boldest of them all, was afraid to speak above his breath.

"May I come and see?" said Grosse, from his peep-hole.

"Keep where you are!" said John, sternly; "You shall see when the right time comes. Yes! the different metals are amalgamating—the baser things passing away from sight before they merge their existence in the higher."

John thought he ought to talk fine under the circumstances, and was doing his best to recall the style in which, in the different books he had read, alchemists spoke of their mystery. Then he drew back from the crucible, and struck his forehead in a kind of despair.

"What's up?" asked Rodwell, as he stared.

"We've forgotten the one great ingredient—the king of all—the master, without whose presence we shall never be able to compel his servants to go on."

"I say, speak English," said Teddy Hooke, who sat perched on a fragment of stone with his hands in his pock-

ets. John had told him he would have nothing to do during the process but to look on and take notes—mental or not—preparatory to his making a full report of all that passed. It was with a view to the task thus assigned him that Teddy said, "I can't put all this down, you know. I never shall remember it."

"Can't we get him from the chemist's?" asked Rodwell.

John shook his head. "Not that way, but we must have him, Rodwell. It's gold we want!—the presence of gold is indispensable, and the old alchemists said so. Sometimes their experiments failed from an insufficiency of the precious metal, but I never knew of an experiment being made where it was absent altogether."

"And we haven't got a sovereign between the whole kit of us," said Grosse.

"But we've got more than a sovereign," replied John. "At least you have, Rodwell. You can supply our need. You can help us on our way to fortune. There's that watch of yours—throw it now, this instant, into the pot, which is now at boiling-point!"

"Oh! I say, I don't see that," cried Rodwell, putting his hand over his watch. It was a large old-fashioned one, and had belonged to his great-grandfather. "You've got one of your own—why don't you put that in."

"So I would, but it's silver, and we must have gold. I've got half-a-crown of my own stewing, but it hasn't begun to melt yet. We *must* have gold, or we shall be at a standstill.

"You ain't going to have my watch, I know," said Rodwell, while the others looked at him as if they were considering the expediency of throwing him down, and taking the watch by main force. Teddy Hooke began to reason with him.

"You'll get lots of tin, you know, to buy another with, Rodwell; and that old thing never keeps time."

"I'm not going to have it melted down for all that," said Rodwell. "I've put four-and-sixpence in this affair, and I think that's enough for one fellow's share."

John looked very hopelessly at the crucible, and then at the furnace. "I'm afraid we shall make a mess of it after all," he said, "and only for the want of a little gold!" and then he looked at Rodwell, and so did all the other boys, as if in keeping his watch he was the enemy of the common weal.

Rodwell himself felt uncomfortable. "I shouldn't mind," he said feebly, "only it's been so long in the family, and if anything happens to it I shall get such a 'rowing' when I go home."

"There is one thing *may* do," said John. "That old Trojan, whose book I've been reading, speaks of a mineral which, if more freely used than gold may, to a certain extent, supply its place. I copied the name of it along with the others, of which I took a memorandum. Here it is —'antimonium metallum aureum.' Now I wonder what that is."

"Some stuff the maker of the book invented, I should

say," said Teddy Hooke. "Never heard of such a thing before."

"Dog Latin, I should call it," said little Miles.

"Well, whatever it is, it is the right thing for us to have if we can't get gold, and gold there seems no getting. Now my opinion is, old Flint's got it, if we can get it out of him. I mentioned it to him, but he seemed to fight shy of letting me have it. But I'm not going to be done by him. He is at a sale to-day at old Squire Middleton's, but I think the old lady will let me have it. The thing is, who's to go for it. If I leave, everything's safe to go wrong."

"The broth will be in the fire, if you ain't here to keep the pot boiling," said Teddy Hooke.

"Don't be vulgar, Hooke. Some one must go and get the 'antimonium metallum aureum,' and I think we can spare you better than any of the rest."

"All right," said Teddy, who did not find his seat a very comfortable one, I'll go, but you must write down the name of that thing; I never can remember all that stuff, you know."

John wrote it down with a pencil on the envelope of a letter which he had in his pocket, and Teddy departed, Grosse looking out very carefully first to see that the coast was clear; then the stones were replaced, and they went on with their operations.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT TEDDY FOUND IN THE IRON CHEST, AND WHAT HE BROUGHT BACK IN THE WOODEN BOX. HOW JOHN'S POT BOILED OVER.

TEDDY found Mrs. Flint at home, and sitting by the fire, stirring broth again. She seemed always to be by the fire, and always to be stirring broth. She looked drowsily up as Teddy went in, and said Mr. Flint is not at home; you had better call another day." That was always her formula when any one went in during her husband's absence.

"You'll do," said Teddy; "I dare say you can let me have what I want," and he took out his paper, and read the three mystical words to her.

"Don't sell it here," said Mrs. Flint; "you'd better try the grocer."

"I daren't go to the grocer; Ashdell said I was not to let any one but you know what I wanted," said Teddy; "I say, just look about and see if you haven't got it. It must be here somewhere. I'll stir the pot for you, if you like, while you are looking."

Mrs. Flint got up to look, grumbling as she went. Teddy stirred the contents of the saucepan, and presently Mrs. Flint came back, and said that nowhere could she find a bottle or box with the queer words on it that were written on the paper which Teddy had shown her.

"Let me look," said Teddy, and he pushed past the old lady, who grumbled more than ever at his impertinence, and went into the closet where the different chemicals were kept. "Looks like a doctor's shop," said Teddy "only there's no bottles of lozenges. I say, old lady, have you looked into that box?" and he went towards an old iron chest in the corner. "I dare say now you've got something good stowed away there."

"Oh, go away, do! go away!" cried Mrs. Flint. "What business have boys like you to come speering and spying about, and, oh, dear! oh, dear! there's my stew boiling over. Such a waste of good stuff; and all through looking after you."

"Good stuff, indeed!" said Teddy: "I should be very sorry to have to swallow the mess; but Mrs. Flint did not hear this polite remark, as she was now busy taking her saucepan off the fire. Teddy lifted up the lid of the iron chest and peeped curiously in. He was rather glad of the opportunity of looking about Reuben Flint's domain, as the boys had such wonderful stories to tell of the old miser and his ways. The first thing Teddy saw in the chest was an old Cashmere shawl; it had been worth a great deal of money in its time, but it was faded and dingy now. He

moved this, and underneath saw something that made him shrink back with affright. It was a grinning skull! Teddy had almost put his finger into its mouth before he was aware of it. He drew his hand back in a much greater hurry than he had put it in. "Don't like meddling with that customer," said Teddy. "Suppose this skull was to haunt me."

Still Teddy felt curious, though frightened; he should like to see what else Flint kept in his iron chest.

"Suppose I find a pot of gold that he's forgotten," said Teddy. "He never can remember all the odds and ends he's got about the place."

He threw the shawl over the skull, and went on with his investigation. There was a bundle of what Teddy took for rags, but which, in reality, was an old brocade dress which Reuben Flint had purchased with some other articles. Tossing this over, Teddy found his finger caught by something more sharp-toothed than the skull, and uttered a perfect shriek of pain as he tried vainly to draw his hand away from the iron prongs of a rat-trap, which had lain *perdu* under the shawl. He pulled out hand, trap and all, and went dancing about in his agony, shrieking wildly, till Mrs. Flint came to his assistance.

She did nothing but scold him at first, upon which Teddy forgot both his manners and his patience. "Hold your row!" he said, "and try and get this thing off—gently—gently—ugh! you're driving it further in. Whatever does possess Flint to keep such a lot of rubbish in that old thing?"

"What possesses you to go hunting in my husband's places?" asked Mrs. Flint, not without reason. "Oh dear! oh dear! there's a customer in the shop! I do wish Mr. Flint would lock it up and take the key with him whenever he goes out. It's the only way to keep it clear of you boys. It's too bad that quiet folks like us, who never had any boys of our own, should be plagued so by other people's."

Away she went to the customer, and Teddy thought he would search a little deeper in the chest. "I'm persuaded the 'mony lorum' is there. It puts me in mind of a story I've heard little Miles tell of how a treasure was found. There's the skull to frighten you away,—I think it was a skeleton as he told it,—and the trap to bite you, if you will go on. It was alive in his tale. Never mind, Mrs. Flint, I ain't so easily frightened. I'm going to look for the 'mony lorum'. I wish the thing had not got such a plaguey long name. If I *do* find it, I ought to have a double share of this pot's boiling, if only to pay for the bite."

He went on with his search, but more carefully, lest there should be another trap set to snare him, and presently came across a small wooden casket or box, looking at least a hundred years old, and with a half-illegible brass inscription on the lid.

"Shouldn't wonder but this is it," said Teddy. "I wish I could make out the letters. I'm certain it's an A, and there's M. I do believe I've got the right thing. I wish I could open the box and see the color. I wonder if the old lady will let me have it. I think I'll cut with it, without

asking her. She's safe to make a fuss; perhaps won't let me have it at all; and John can settle with the old man afterwards."

He was so delighted with the thought of having secured the prize they were in want of, that he never stopped to consider the propriety of the matter, but hurried off, squeezing the box in the inside pocket of his jacket. Mrs. Flint was still engaged with the customer, a lady who, driving through the town, had been attracted by some of the old carvings in the window, and alighted to ask their price. Mrs. Flint did not notice Teddy as he went through, being just then trying to pull an old chair forward which the lady wished to have a better view of. Teddy hurried on, and was very soon in the Castle and before the vault, where he knocked three several times, as had been agreed, at the stone before the opening, with a pebble he had picked up for that purpose. These knocks were given with such solemnity, that if Teddy had been before a robber's cave he could not have performed them with better effect.

The stones were moved away, and those within said eagerly, "Have you got it, old fellow? What a precious long time you have been!"

"I've got it," said Teddy; "at least I think so. But you don't know what a hunt I've had for it. I say, how dark this place is! You'll never be able to see whether it's the right stuff or not."

"Snuff the candles, Rodwell," said John, which Rodwell did, with his fingers. "Now, Teddy, let's see what you've got."

Teddy was in no hurry to produce the box, but wanted first of all to impress his friends with an idea of the great efforts he had made to procure it. His description of the iron chest, the skull, and the trap, thrilled them with mingled delight and horror. They were all of one opinion that a treasure so carefully guarded was likely to be the "real thing," as John expressed it, and they were disposed to think a little more of Teddy Hooke than they had ever done before.

John brought the box to the candles. "There's an A on it—you're right, Hooke—and I can make out N and M. Shouldn't wonder at all but this is the thing we want. The book says a blue-greyish powder. If we can open the box, and find it the right color, we may make sure that it's the same. The thing is, how to open it."

"Break the lid open with the poker," said Rodwell, taking up a small piece of iron which did duty for that article. "Bring it here, and let's have it open."

He stood by the furnace with the poker in his hand. John hurried to look at his melting-pot. "It's all going on finely; if that is the right thing—and something tells me, Teddy, that it is—our fortunes are all made. I say, won't we give the whole school a tuck out, and have a good flare up in honor of it!"

Little Miles went on stirring the pot. John held the box with the lid upwards, so that Rodwell could bring the poker down on it; then Rodwell hesitated.

"I say, after all, the box is not ours, and breaking a

lock is a serious matter. We may get into a precious scrape."

"I'll make it all right with old Flint," cried John, eagerly. "We'll give him a share in the concern, if that's all. We can't lose our share now, you know, just because Teddy did not settle the price with him. Now bring the poker well down on the middle. We shall spill a little if the box is full; but never mind, I dare say there will be enough. Oh! I say, if it should be the right thing! It takes my breath away to think of it!"

Down came the poker on the very centre of the box, and whiz! fiz! bang! crash! every boy in that vault thought the Castle was coming down upon him. John had talked of having a "flare up," and there was one indeed! The furnace threw out flames that reached to the ceiling, the whole place was full of foul air and sulphurous smoke, which seemed determined to find vent, rend the very stones, and burst out in spite of those at the door. There was a great cry from every boy present, as, bruised and bleeding, they tried to make their way out, but fell senseless one on the other, just at the opening which the explosion had made. John remained behind, more seriously hurt than any, not having the power even to make an effort to escape, while the box that had caused all this mischief rolled towards the door, and was fortunately too far from the furnace to do any further mischief.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DOCTOR FINDS HE HAS A TROUBLESOME PUPIL. JOHN IS DISGUSTED WITH THE INGRATITUDE OF HIS FRIENDS.

DR. RAVEN looked round that evening when the boys met together at the hour of study to prepare their lessons for the next day, and saw some few absent. "Where's Ashdell?" he asked, but that was more than any one could tell him. The Doctor felt uneasy. "That boy has been up to some mischief," was his thought; "I hope he hasn't any of the others with him."

But it soon became apparent that he had, as Rodwell, Grosse, Miles, and Hooke, failed to respond when called upon. The Doctor's misgivings returned, and he went up to Mr. Vane's room to see if he could give him any clue as to the whereabouts of the absentees.

All Mr. Vane could tell him was that Ashdell and the others had been rather fond of strolling towards the Castle lately, but that that was a favorite lounge with most new boys, and he had thought it nothing particular in Ashdell going there, nor in the others accompanying him. It was possible that they might have strayed beyond bounds

and lost their way, in which case they would be sure to return sooner or later, very much crestfallen, and a severe imposition would teach them to keep within limits for the future.

"That is all I should apprehend myself," said the Doctor, "in the case of any boy but Ashdell, but he is such an odd fellow. I have been afraid, ever since he came to the school, of some outbreak or another, or rathei of his very eccentric genius leading him into some serious scrape. I don't believe now that he's been up to anything really wrong, but he's done something foolish, and persuaded the others to join him in it. I shouldn't be satisfied without going round the Castle myself. I'll take Stebbs with me; he knows the whole place thoroughly, and if they are there he'll find them.

Stebbs was the school porter, and had lived in the town from his boyhood. The Doctor told him to accompany him, and bring a dark lantern with him. He was afraid some of the pupils had gone to the Castle, and lost their way in the underground vaults. The Doctor's own idea was that John might possibly have taken it into his head that he could discover a treasure by digging for it; he never imagined that he had dreamed of making one. He said nothing to the other masters, and slipped out quietly and walked on towards the Castle, followed by Stebbs.

It was a lovely night, clear and moonlight. The old castie looked grand in the white silvery light, but the Doctor, though a lover of the picturesque, was too full of

anxiety to think about that. On he stepped, looking keenly about for the missing boys, and at last, raising his voice, called them by name. But no answer came, and the Doctor was thinking of ascending the steps that led to the summit of the highest tower, in order that he might see whether his pupils had mounted there, when Stebbs suggested that they should look below first.

"There's a mort o' places lads like they might hide in, where they'd never hear the sound o' voice if they wanted tew answer it, Doctor. Let's take them first, and I'll turn my light on full."

So he did, and down the Doctor went to parts he had never been before, familiar as he thought himself with the Castle's damp slippery steps, down which he often thought he should fall, and through vaults and cellars one after the other, where the darkness was so dense, that the lantern only threw a feeble light for a yard or so around and left the rest in gloom.

"They could never have come here," he said. "I knew there were queer nooks in the old place when I told you to bring your lantern, but nothing like this. No, I think we must look for them elsewhere. This is too unlikely."

"The more unlikely the better chance o' findin' them, sir," said Stebbs. "That's my experience o' boys, sir. If they're missin', just go and look in the last place that they had oughter be in, and you'll be pretty sure to come across them. They may ha' been huntin' for bogies. Foolish folk hev a mort o' stories about this place, an the

young gentlemen may ha' thou't they'd just see if some o them wern't there. Hark! was that a groan dew you think, sir?"

The Doctor listened, and gave it as his opinion that it *was* a groan. It came from beneath them. Looking about as well as the insufficient light the lantern gave would permit, they saw, a few steps to the right, and below, a faint glimmer of light. "There's somethin' up, here," said Stebbs. "Let's go down tew see."

Down the steps they went, and came to another large vault, at the end of which they perceived an aperture, through which the dull red light they had noticed showed itself. They walked on and again heard the groan repeated, only more distinctly, and then a voice in troublous tones as if smothered with sighs, but which reminded the Doctor of Teddy Hooke's when his mouth was full of pudding, say—

"You said we should have a flare up, Ashdell, and I think we've had one. Oh! I say, however are we to get out of this precious mess?"

"There they are, sir!" whispered Stebbs to his master, "and I should say they've had some nice rigs. Shouldn't wonder by their talk but that they've blown half their legs and arms off!"

The Doctor stepped forward, and presently trod on something which close inspection showed him was a boy. It was Rodwell, who moved cowering under the Doctor's foot.

"Is that you, Ashdell? Oh! I say, haven't we gone and done it! Why didn't you tell us you were going to blow us all up, like so many Guy Fawkeses?"

"Nice young gentleman that Master Ashdell seems, tew be sure!" said Stebbs. "He'll kill half the school, if he's let tew have his own way."

By the light of the lantern the Doctor saw two other boys, and, looking at them more closely, recognized Miles and Grosse. They showed signs of returning consciousness, but had evidently been seriously hurt. The Doctor, however, thought there was no cause for any great alarm on their account. He was anxious, however, to discover the author of the mischief.

"I hope Ashdell hasn't killed himself," he said, gravely; "I can see nothing of him."

"He may have made a thorough job of it as far as he's concerned, and blown himself tew bits," said Stebbs; "but I don't think it's likely; I expect there's a deal of mischief yet waitin' in this world for that young gentleman tew dew."

"Bring the light this way, Stebbs, and let's look here," said the Doctor, and he stooped his stately height, and made his way through the aperture.

The small space within was lighter than the larger vault out of which it opened, owing to the fire in the stove, which had not yet gone out, and from which the light the Doctor and Stebbs had seen came. Very near the stove, crouched in a heap, head, hands, and knees all together, looking the

very picture of helpless, hopeless misery, sat John Ashdell. The Doctor was about to speak to him when his foot struck against something on the floor, and picking it up he found that it was a small wooden box.

John raised his head languidly as he did so, then gave a groan.

"That's it—that's done it."

Then he relapsed into silence, as if speech were an effort too great for him.

"Done what?" said the Doctor, as he turned the box over. "Stebbs, bring your light here for a moment."

He held the box close to the lantern and examined its contents, of which there was still a small portion remaining. "Hum," he said, "I suppose you mean this stuff has pretty well blown you up. I don't wonder at it. What business have you to go meddling with gunpowder?"

"Gunpowder!" cried John, "and that flat, Hooke, brought it for the 'antimonium metallum aureum.' Oh dear! what is the good of trying to make the fortunes of a set of fellows like these?"

"I think the sooner you're all away from this the better," said the Doctor, "or we may have another explosion. Stebbs, see if you can help me bring these unhappy boys up the stairs. Then I'll get you to go back to the school for assistance to carry them there."

"I think I can walk, sir," said John, and he tried, with the Doctor's assistance. "Oh dear! I feel so queer—and —and—what's the matter with my face?"

He passed his hand over it as he spoke, and observed, "I don't believe I've a bit of eyebrow left."

"I dare say not," said the Doctor. "You may feel very thankful you've got your head still on your shoulders."

As they passed out, Teddy Hooke raised his head gently. "Is that you, Ashdell? Isn't this a precious go?"

"Mind what you're about," said Stebbs, "it's the Doctor."

Hooke began to cry.

"Oh, please sir, we were led into it—it was none of our doing."

John turned from him with contempt: "Hooke, you don't deserve to have a friend. You don't know, sir," he added, addressing the Doctor, "what I meant to do for that fellow."

"You shall tell me all about it another time," said the Doctor; "I've no doubt your intentions were excellent, but you seem to have adopted rather an unfortunate way of carrying them out."

Miles, Grosse, and Rodwell, followed by Hooke, all in a woful state of bewilderment, not at all sure where they were, or what had happened to them, were supported up and out into the air; there the Doctor remained with them while Stebbs went to the school-house and presently returned with Mr. Raven's pony-chaise, in which they were all squeezed together, the Doctor thinking the sooner they were in their beds the better. John volunteered to walk home, which he did, with the Doctor's assistance. He had

very little to say; all his loquacity seemed to have deserted him; he was for the time thoroughly crestfallen and humbled.

"I shouldn't mind anything," he said, in answer to the Doctor's inquiries about his hurts, "if it wasn't for the ingratitude of those fellows. They deserve to have a friend who nearly kills himself in trying to serve them!"

"But, at the same time, Ashdell, you've nearly killed them," said the Doctor, "which perhaps may have something to do with lessening their gratitude."

John said no more. He was too tired and worn. He was got to bed, and medical assistance being sent for at once, he and his friends were ordered to remain there, which they did for some days to come.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW WAY OF ANGLING. HOW, IN TRYING TO CATCH A DUCK, JOHN MADE A GOOSE OF HIMSELF.

JOHN was very unhappy after this affair. He said he should be ashamed to show his face in the school again, and there really was some reason for his saying so. His eyebrows were burnt, his hair was singed, and he had several scars on his face. The Doctor was very kind to him. He pointed out the folly of his late proceedings, demonstrated to his own satisfaction, if not to John's, the impossibility of making gold from inferior substances, told him different stories about the old alchemists, and dwelt on the clandestine nature of the whole proceeding. John was very sorry he had grieved his master. He was beginning to like the Doctor very much, and he felt a little ashamed of his conduct to him. There was no fear of his trying to make gold again; the failure of this experiment would be sufficient; and for once he imputed that failure, not to some unfortunate accident, but to the thing itself being one that did not deserve to succeed. The conduct of Hooke grieved him very much; and the others, when they got better, said

some very unpleasant things to him about the money they had embarked in the "concern," and the total loss there seemed likely to be. John promised to pay them all back as soon as he could, and this had some effect in mollifying their feelings towards him. He said, however, that the first person to be repaid was certainly old Flint. "You fellows went into this with your eyes open, but he was regularly cheated out of his gunpowder, and the box has got the lock broken."

The Doctor, however, took another view of the matter. *He* said that Hooke, having run away with the box, was bound to make reparation to Flint for whatever loss he had sustained; and Master Teddy had his pocket-money stopped accordingly, and felt himself, for some time to come, a very ill-used boy.

Rodwell Grosse, and little Miles, too, were shy of John for a while, but Hooke was the first to forget what had passed, or, rather, to appear to do so. Perhaps it was partly due to a large hamper which John received from home, and the contents of which he was quite ready to share. Indeed, he was so good-natured that the better disposed of his schoolfellows found it impossible not to like him; although, of course, in a great public school like this, John found his "ideas" produce more ridicule than they had ever done before. The hamper, however, went a long way towards making matters pleasant with others than Teddy Hooke, and John receiving soon after a very handsome tip from an old friend of his father's,

who came to see him, he was able to reimburse his friends for their pecuniary loss in the great experiment of gold-making, and so, as he said to himself, "shut up their mouths for them."

That was all very well, but he couldn't shut up everybody's mouth, and though the boys liked him very much, still they could not refrain from asking him when he was going to pave the streets with gold, or how long it was since his pot left off boiling, or if he was going to set up private diggings of his own; all these little allusions were anything but pleasant to John's feelings. He had two or three fights. John was not a boy to fight if he could help it, but, when he did, it was in thorough earnest, and, after a time, he was left in some degree of peace, which, however, could not prevent his entertaining a rankling feeling of despondency that the new world, in which he had so hoped to distinguish himself, should have thus disappointed him.

After a while Teddy Hooke and he became as good friends as ever. John could not exist without some one to talk to, and Teddy, after swallowing such an ample share of the contents of the hamper as he had done, felt disposed to swallow almost anything else from John. They went to the Castle again. John had given his word of honor to the Doctor that he would not repeat his experiment in gold-making, but even if he had not promised, he would have refrained from anything of the kind. John never repeated his experiments if they were unsuccessful ones, but

always turned his attention to something else, and it was not very long before he began to talk to Teddy about a new "idea" that had dawned upon his mind.

This, like the last, was not an original one. I don't know whether any of you boys have ever read Washington Irving's very charming book "The Alhambra;" but when I had the great pleasure, I was very much struck by a description he gives of the angling in the air which some of the inhabitants of the grand old Moorish palace were in the habit of practising. Mr. Vane lent this book to John, thinking that he certainly would get nothing out of *that;* but, of course, this angling for birds, being the one odd, peculiar notion in the volume, Master John seized upon it, and was as delighted with it as if it had been his own.

He didn't say anything to Mr. Vane about the "idea," but he did to Teddy, who thought it, on the whole, a very good one. "Much better than trapping the poor things," said John, "worrying and torturing them. Now, when you catch them, you can put them out of their misery at once."

"But what shall we do with them when we have put them out of it?" asked Teddy; "we can't eat them all."

"I didn't think of eating any," said John; "my notion was to form a collection of stuffed birds, a little ornithological museum; old Flint's going to show me how to stuff them, and he says if I get a real good kingfisher or a woodpecker, I might make something by it. I shouldn't

mind selling one or two, for after paying all you fellows back what you put into that unlucky affair, I am very short just now."

"Roasted larks are very nice!" observed Teddy; "so are sparrows!"

"Well, you get a hook and catch as many as you please, and we'll cook them on the top of the tower up there; that's where I am going fishing from."

"If they see smoke, they'll think we're making gold again," said Teddy; "no, I'll cook my birds down on the ground—when I've caught 'em."

John and he set to work to manufacture lines and look for bait. They got quite a tinful of fine lively worms, which they thought more likely to attract birds than butterflies or other insects. Whether the birds would ever inquire how it was that worms came floating in the air, they did not trouble themselves to ask, but took it for granted they would be glad of worms, let them find them where they might. The lines were very strong, of the best catgut. "They would pull up a twenty-pound salmon out of the water," John said, "let alone a bird, that wouldn't weigh as many ounces, out of the air." And the next half-holiday they went to the Castle, crept up the ruinous stairs of the tower, and set to work to catch birds.

They were not so lucky as Washington Irving's anglers; perhaps English birds are more cunning than Spanish ones; but round and round the old tower the swallows flew and flitted in and out of their nests, and

the sparrows chirruped and chattered, and the wrens and thrushes sang their notes of wonderment at the oddity of an unhappy worm dangling midway in the air; but not one of them cared to take the tempted morsel. Teddy got out of all patience. "I think I'll try the other side;" he said, "all the birds that build on this are too shy and frightened to be any good."

The other side of the tower looked down upon a road which led into the town. It was not much frequented, save by carters and wagoners, who sometimes drove their vehicles along here to avoid the toll-gate at the other end of Bessingham. The tower on this side had one advantage for our two anglers—the battlements were not nearly so much broken away, consequently they would be better hidden from the birds below them. They had selected the side looking into the Castle court-yard at first as being the quietest, but John agreed with Teddy that it would be useless remaining there longer.

They sat and angled for some time in vain; not a bird seemed to care for the poor red wriggling bait that floated in the air. At last there came by a cartload of ducks, gabbling and quacking away, and they were met by a wagon coming from the town, piled high with the wet straw and litter from different stables, which was being taken to some farmer's for manure.

"I wonder whether one of those ducks would bite," thought Teddy; "what a fine roast he'd make if he would," and down went his hook right in the centre of the cart.

The ducks were hungry, and perhaps they did not think it quite so strange that a worm should come down into their midst as did the wilder birds of the air. Every one of them had eyes for the prize; they quacked louder than ever, and at last one sturdy drake succeeded in securing the tempting mouthful, but found, when he attempted to swallow it, that he had more than he had bargained for, the hook sticking fast in his throat.

Away he went up in the air, and the driver of the cart, as he turned his head to see what this unusual commotion was amongst his ducks, stared at seeing one of them flying with flapping wings and outstretched neck up to the very summit of the tower. Never had duck flown in such a manner before, or to such a height. If they should all follow this one's example, and go after their comrade to the top of the tower!

He was all but up, all but over, and Teddy was rejoicing in his success, while John was so cheered with the result of his experiment, that he quite forgot that it was not a very honest one, and then down went the duck! Teddy had not drawn his line in sufficiently, and the bird, to those below, seemed to have thought better of matters, and to be making up his mind to travel to the town peaceably with his companions.

But he could not return to the cart, even if he wished it, or if those above had been disposed to let him do so. The horse had gone on a few paces unchecked by the driver in his first astonishment, and now, right under the

tower in the very spot from which Master Drake had been elevated, stood the wagon with its load of manure, its driver quite as much astonished at the extraordinary gyrations of the bird as his owner had been.

"Just catch him for me, will ye," shouted the latter, and the wagoner put up his two hands to seize the drake, which again soared slowly but most mysteriously up into the air. John was pulling him in, now he had taken the rod and line from Teddy, and was really showing considerable science by the manner in which he hauled the drake in. But the wagoner had keener eyes than the driver of the cart, and he saw the rope projecting between the battlements of the tower, and formed some idea of the manner in which the bird had been hooked.

"I'll stop yewre tricks!" he cried, and rising on the footboard of the wagon, seized the duck. John was furious at the thought of losing his bird. That he should lose his prize just in the very moment of successful capture! He would have given, if he had had it, the price of half-a-dozen ducks to have saved that one. He pulled, and the wagoner pulled; then John stooped forward in order to draw in the line better, and the man below, seeing him, tugged yet harder, thinking to break the line and save the duck. He succeeded in breaking it, and succeeded in doing something else, for John, stooping forward, lost his balance, and, to Teddy's horror, fell toppling over.

"He'll break his neck!" cried that young gentleman; and, Teddy's first thought generally being for himself, he

added, "I wonder what they'll do to me for being with him?"

Teddy sat down and crouched behind the battlements. If those fellows below haven't seen me, perhaps nothing will come of it. I think I'll keep quiet where I am till they've gone. Then I'll get down and look after Ashdell. But what ever shall I do with him if he's killed outright?"

Teddy was too afraid to stir for full five minutes, and when he did get up and peer over the battlements, not a vestige could he see of either ducks, drake, cart, wagon, their respective drivers, or John. He took comfort from the disappearance of the latter. "I suppose he has picked himself up again, and will soon be coming here. Well, don't think I shall stop any longer. I'll go down and tell him, as I meet him, that I've had enough of this fun. It isn't worth while taking the chance of being broken to pieces for all the birds in the world."

Then he went down the steep broken stairs, expecting at every step to meet John, but still without doing so. He looked about at the bottom of the tower for him, and searched through the court-yard; then he made up his mind he had gone home.

"Hurt himself, I suppose, or perhaps got the duck after all, and sneaked away with it. Mean, I call that! what I shouldn't have thought Ashdell would have done. When I *do* see him, I'll let him know what I think of him."

And back to the school playground went Teddy Hooke, full of wrath against the boy he called his

friend; and inclined, like a great many people much older and wiser than he was, to judge every one else by himself, which, let me tell you, my boys, is not always the best mode of coming to a correct estimate of other people.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SENSATION AT SCHOOL. A SCOLDING FOR TEDDY HOOKE, AND ANOTHER MOONLIGHT SEARCH BY THE DOCTOR.

HOWEVER, John had not gone back to school, either with or without the duck, for Teddy saw nothing of him when he returned there; saw nothing of him, either, when the boys assembled for tea, nor even when they were gathered together for prayers. Then the Doctor grew angry, and alarmed as well. "This will never do," he said aside to Mr. Vane; "this one boy is a greater charge than the whole school; I wish he had never set his foot in it; and yet I like the lad, too."

Then inquiries were made of every one, whether or not they could tell anything of Ashdell. Teddy kept a discreet silence—"Got into a row about the ducks and bolted," he thought; "cut away home, I suppose; or else they have taken him to jail for trying to steal one. Well, I don't think I'll say anything about it. I can't do Ashdell any good, and may do myself a great deal of harm, so I'll just keep quiet."

But Master Teddy was not allowed to keep quiet

Most of the boys were ready to say that he and Jchn had gone out together; and several knew they had visited the Castle that afternoon. "That unlucky Castle!" groaned the Doctor. "I wonder what is the last 'idea he's been trying to carry out in the old place." Then he insisted on Teddy's acquainting him with all the particulars of their recent visit there; where they had been, and what they had been doing. It all came out by degrees; only as one of the boys said, "just as slowly as treacle trickles." They had been to the top of the tower fishing!

"Fishing!" There was a general outcry here, which not even the presence of the Doctor could restrain.

"Fishing for birds," Teddy explained. "Ashdell had 'got an idea,'" and as soon as he uttered these words, which by this time had become so familiar to them all, there was a roar of laughter, in which the Doctor could not help joining.

"Well, he caught one gull, at any rate," said Stebbs, in a very audible voice aside, as he looked at Teddy, who stood with his hands in his pockets, turning over and over a stray halfpenny or two he had found at the bottom of them, and looking helplessly and miserably at the Doctor.

"Well, what was Ashdell's 'idea'?" said the latter.

"That we might catch birds in the air, just as we do fishes in the water," said Teddy. "He got the notion, he said, out of a book which Mr. Vane had lent him."

The Doctor looked at his second master for an explanation.

"Washington Irving's Alhambra!" said the latter in amazement. "To think of his turning the book to account in this manner!"

"Well, go on, sir," said the Doctor, and on Teddy went:

"Then the hook somehow got in a duck's mouth, that was just going by, and in trying to pull it up, I suppose it pulled Ashdell down, for I saw him go over head foremost, with his heels kicking up in the air."

There was a great sensation here. This was very dreadful. The Doctor turned pale; then said, angrily, "Why didn't you tell me of this before, sir. I suppose the poor boy is lying bruised and senseless at the foot of the tower; and you have been such an insensate little dolt as not to acquaint me with what had happened for fear of bringing punishment on yourself. Go to your room, sir! you're not fit to associate with boys possessed of any decent feeling. The rest of you may remain up for another hour, as I have no doubt you are all anxious to hear what has become of Ashdell."

"He isn't at the foot of the tower, sir," said Teddy, beginning to cry. "I stooped over and looked, as soon as I'd got the better of my fright, and I could see nothing of him or the duck either; so I came back to the school, thinking he must have gone somewhere to get it cooked. It was a fine fat one!"

"Pick himself up after such a fall!" said the Doctor, in amazement, "and walk away with a duck under his arm

Why, the boy must have ninety lives instead of nine! However, I shall not rest satisfied with your version of the matter; but will go myself at once, and see if I can find Ashdell." Then he called Stebbs; and the porter, as before, went out with him.

"This be nice work, sir, on winter nights, turning out after that young gentleman," said Stebbs. "It's tew be hoped, if yew're to keep yew're health, that he'll either break his neck up there, or his friends will find a different place for him—a 'sylum I should say, would be about the best."

But the Doctor was too anxious to attend to Stebbs As before, he searched through every corner of the Castle, and then, not finding John, went through the town, and made inquiries, but could hear nothing of him; and so he returned home very disheartened, angry with the boy who had led him such a chase, and yet, more distressed on his account than annoyed at his folly.

If Master Teddy had only told the *whole* truth, instead of giving such a garbled version of the affair, the Doctor would have arrived at some solution of the matter, which might have set his mind so far at rest, that he would have seen how it was possible for John to fall from the tower, and yet escape without broken bones, by having alighted, as he had done, on the summit of the piled-up mountain of manure, which just then was stationary beneath the Castle walls.

CHAPTER XV.

JOHN HAS A LONG DRIVE, BUT NOT A PLEASANT ONE. HE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE IN A NEW CHARACTER AT "THE THREE MAGPIES."

"YEW'VE got a soft bed, but a rare mucky one," said the wagoner, as John sank down in the very centre of the wet straw, and lay for a moment breathless and frightened by the fall. For a whole minute he was silent; then he tried to extricate himself from the soft wet mass into which he had fallen, and in which, indeed, he was afraid of being smothered, and said, "Just stop, will you and help me out of this?"

"Now, now," said the wagoner, giving his horses another cut with the whip, "yew got in for yew're own divarsion, and yew'll stop in for mine. I don't hold with young gentlefolks tryin' tew steal poor folks' ducks. I'm thinking if yew'd got a schulemaister he'd ha' sumthin' tew say tew ye."

"Well, you ain't my schoolmaster," said John; "and I don't see that it's any business of yours. I'll trouble you to stop your horses at once, and help me get down. I don't wan't to be riding on the top of this mess."

"What for did yew get into it?" asked the wagoner; "I didn't tell yew tew cum. But I'm thinkin' yew won't find it quite so easy to get down. I've a mind to give yew a bit of a ride."

John was furious, but it was all of no use; the wagoner did not mind him in the least, and as to getting down himself from the top of that moving mountain, it was out of the question.

"I've a great mind to punch your head," he said at last to the wagoner, by way of a conclusive argument.

"I wouldn't advise yew tew try," said the other: "just keep a civil tongue in yewr head, or I'll lay yew down right in the very middle o' the muck, with a rare lot ov' it, as good as half-a-dozen blankets, on the top o' ye. Yew'll, maybe, find it warm, but I don't think it'll be altogether nice."

John thought it best to say nothing more after this—the wagoner looked quite capable of executing his threat—and on they went, mile after mile, till at last they stopped at a small public-house, where the horses took a draught out of the road-side trough, and their driver called for a pint of ale.

The landlady brought it out herself; then seeing John, she said, "There's some one up there chosen a queer place for a ride."

"Aye, I've just got him out wi' me tew give him a lesson," said the wagoner; and he told her the manner in which John had come there.

"'Twere a new way of stealing altogether, an so I'm going tew steal *him*. O'ny for a bit tho'; I wouldn't be troubled with him for long. I think if he has tew trudge back a dozen miles or so tew his schule, it'll maybe teach him manners."

The landlady looked sympathizingly at John, but she had poultry of her own, and thought people had no business to find out new ways of stealing ducks; still, she said, "I shude say he didn't mean it. Young folks will be foolish. 'Twere on'y a bit o' skylarkin' like."

"Let him keep his larks away from other people's ducks," said the wagoner; and on he drove, and the land-'ady went back to the inn.

John, while they had been resting, had seen his opportunity, and now lost no time in seizing it. Over the road there hung the sign of the inn, "The Three Magpies," rudely painted on a board, which was supported by a stout iron bracket. John felt sure that this iron arm would support his weight, and as the wagon passed directly under it, he swung himself on to the sign, crawled along, and crept into a small open window just above. When he had alighted on the floor, he took breath—for it had been rather a dangerous experiment—and looked around him. He was in a small loft, or lumber room, with a little old furniture in it, and some sacks piled in the corner.

"I'll get out of this," thought John, "as soon as that fellow's out of sight. I suppose I shall easily find my way to the stairs."

He went to the door with the intention of looking out, but found it was fastened on the other side. "Never mind," he thought, "there's plenty of time; some one will soon be coming by, and I'll call out and let them know I'm here I may as well make myself as comfortable as I can on those sacks while I'm waiting."

So he did, and rather too comfortable. He was quite tired out with angling on the top of the tower and then riding on the wagon; besides which his fall made him feel rather faint and dizzy; so he lay down, pulled one of the sacks over him, and slept for some hours, at the end of which time he awoke, and found himself rather chilly, owing to the cool evening air coming in, and was surprised to find that the daylight had gone and the moon and stars were peeping in at him through the little window.

"Here's a pretty go!" cried John. "It's past hours, and I shall catch it no end. What a bore it is to be bound so by rules and hours! I often wish I was a gypsy, or a wild Indian, or a Hottentot—no; I think they're rather a nasty set. But I do think our civilized life's a great nuisance. I wish I'd come into the world before clocks were made. I suppose I must make a row at this door, and ask them to let me out. Is that somebody coming in? No! They've gone further. Well, I can't stand this any longer. Here goes to stir the house up! I wonder what they'll say when they find me here."

He kicked, and he hallooed, and at last succeeded in making himself heard. The landlady came to the outside

of the door, and so did the landlord, as, too, did several of the customers from the tap-room, but they were afraid to go into the room, and gathered together, wondering how anybody could have got into it when the door was always kept locked. As to the window being left open, that was an oversight of the landlord, who had gone into the loft that morning, and, thinking it would be better for a little ventilation, had opened the casement, and neglected to close it again.

They gathered together, and whispered and wondered. John was getting quite impatient; the later he was, the worse it would be for him when he returned to school; so he kicked once more at the door, and demanded indignantly to be let out.

"Open it!" cried the landlady to her husband; "open it, Tom!"

"I'd like tew know first who it is," was the answer, "an what for he cum there."

"I wouldn't let him out till I'd the constable to take him," said another; "he ain't a bin hidin' ther' for noa good."

"Let's see who it is," cried the landlady, who was getting curious; "what are yew all so frightened for; ain't ther' plenty of ye to stop him?"

"Maybe he's got fire-arms," said one of the customers.

"Maybe he'll know better than to use them if he has," said the landlady. "I'll let him out, if no one else will;" and she turned the key in the lock, which her husband had

put there, and been afraid to do more; and then said—"Now come out, whoever yew are, and let's see what like yew are."

Out John came, and at the very sight of him, there was a rush and a shriek and a general flight down the steep, narrow staircase, every one hastening to be first; the landlady herself screaming louder, and running faster, than anybody. John was very much puzzled at this.

"What a set of ninnies they are," he said, "to be frightened of *me*." But as there was no time to be lost, he walked down the stairs and out of the open door, resolved to make the best of his way back to school.

He heard another shriek, in which every one seemed to be joining, as he passed the tap-room, and, looking in, saw the landlady leaning back in an arm-chair and trying her very best to faint, or look as if she did, while her husband and the different customers were gathered round her in various attitudes of surprise and alarm.

"Precious set of muffs!" said John; "but I've no time to waste upon them. I wonder what on earth all the row's about."

If John had only taken a little more notice of the sacks on which he had flung himself, he might have arrived at a pretty fair guess at the cause of the alarm into which he had thrown the frequenters of "The Three Magpies." Its landlord was part owner of a small windmill, and it was here that the empty sacks were deposited. One or two of them had not been emptied quite so thoroughly as they should

have been, and the contents had lodged on John's clothes, but especially on his face, and the moonlight from a small window on the staircase falling on the latter as he opened the door, had given it a strange and weird appearance, which, in conjunction with the singularity of any one being in the loft at all, had thoroughly frightened the country folk—a fright which they were a long time in getting over; and to this day they are given to talk of the ghost of "The Three Magpies."

CHAPTER XVI.

JOHN MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE GYPSIES, AND IS CHARMED WITH THEIR RECEPTION OF HIM.

JOHN walked on by the light of the moon, thinking, not too hopefully, of the reception he should meet with when he got back to school. "The Doctor will be down upon me, and I shall have a thousand lines to write out, besides being kept in for the next fortnight. What a nuisance school is! I don't mind the lessons, if I could just be allowed to do them at my own time and in my own way, but to be wound up like a clock, and set going like a machine, seems to me quite beneath the dignity of any rational and intelligent being. Hallo! I do believe I've come wrong. I never was in this part of the world before."

He found himself in a field from which the crop had some time since been carted, and which now looked brown and bare, owing to the long dry summer. A broad path, wide enough for a cart, ran on one side of it, and at the lower side of the field there was the remains of a common which had not yet been reclaimed and made into meadow-land

Perhaps this was due to the presence of a gravel pit, which was not yet exhausted, and which, with its brown sides sloping down into a wide hollow, overhung here and there by several misshapen trees, looked picturesque enough in the moonlight. But the scene was made more picturesque still in John's eyes by the presence of a small party of gypsies who had gathered round a fire. Near them were two or three tents—that is to say, blankets supported by poles—and these looked white enough in the moonlight; while some brown-skinned, black-eyed children, who peeped from underneath or rolled under the furze bushes, struck him as the merriest urchins he had ever seen, and the smell of the gypsy stew, when one of the women lifted off the lid and stirred the saucepan, was the most appetizing he had ever inhaled.

John quite forgot, as he drank it in with delight, that it was nearly eight hours since he had dined, and that he had had no tea, but set it all down to the credit of the gypsies' cookery.

"That's the life for me," he said, as he gave another sniff; "free and easy, no rules; no regularity, nothing to worry yourself about; no fuss, no stuck-up nonsense, no show, no sham; shouldn't I like it? I've got an idea! I was born to be a gypsy; it's just the sort of life for me; and they're such jolly fellows, by all I've heard. I suppose they do steal from the farmers now and then; but, after all, perhaps that may be only a spiteful story the farmers make up Who's to know it's true. I wonder now if these have got

their king with them, or if they could tell me anything about him. I should like to see a real gypsy-king. Dear me, if I were to take to that life, perhaps they'd make me king, as being better educated and better informed. That's just what I should like; I'd have no thieving then, and if we found England didn't suit us, we'd go to Canada or Mexico, anywhere where there was plenty of corn and plenty of game. I don't know, though, about my mother; I'm afraid she wouldn't like the life, and I shouldn't like to leave her for more than a year or two. Well, one can see a great deal of the world in a year or two. I might found a new colony, start a new empire, as Romulus did, in that time, and then come back and settle down on my laurels. I should have done something to astonish those fellows at the school by that time, something that would take the shine out of them, I'm thinking, and show them, after all, I've got a little more sense than they give me credit for."

By this time he was near the gypsies, and one of the women came up and offered to tell him his fortune. John declined, but intimated that he would much rather pay a shilling for a share of their supper. He was not only hungry, but tired, having come much further out of his way than he had imagined. He thought if he had something to eat he should be all right. The gypsies made room for him, but as he was about to seat himself near their fire his foot slipped, and he nearly fell to the ground.

"I'm afraid I've sprained my ankle," he said, with a

little alarm. "Here's a precious go! How shall I ever get on to-night?"

"Had you much further to go, dearey?" asked one of the gypsies, a wrinkled old woman, with a crafty look in her eyes.

"Yes, that I had, and I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to stir another step," he said. "If I haven't sprained my ankle, I've given it a twist."

"Let me look at the foot, dearey?" said the old woman, and she drew off John's boot and sock and examined the injured foot. "'Tisn't a sprain, dearey, only a twist, as you say, but you'll not be able to go any further to-night Where was it you wanted to go?"

"Oh, a long way from here!" replied John. He did not feel disposed to tell them he was going back to school; if they thought he was a schoolboy, he imagined they would not treat him with so much deference as they were doing now. The gypsies noticed this reserve, and drew their own conclusions from it. They imagined that instead of hastening back to school he was hurrying from it.

"I suppose one couldn't hire a chaise or anything of that sort?" asked John. "Precious hole that'll make in what little tin I've got left, if I get it," was his thought; "but I suppose it's the best thing to be done. If the Doctor sees me driving back to the school, he'll know at least that I was in earnest about getting there."

"The poor gypsies have neither horses nor carriages," said the old woman, "and a grand young gentleman like

you"—she had caught sight of Master John's watch-chain, and the flour on his clothes, though it puzzled her, did not conceal from her sharp eyes that they were well made—"would not like to ride in one of their carts with only a donkey to draw it. Besides, that would jolt and hurt the poor foot so sadly."

"Well, I shouldn't like to go up to the school in a donkey-cart," thought John; "Stebbs would tell, and I never should hear the last of it from those fellows then. But what am I to do?" he said aloud, looking round the field and the common, as if in search of some hotel where he might rest for the night.

"What the poor gypsies can do, they will do, dearey," said the old woman. "Stay here with us, sleep in one of our tents, and to-morrow the foot may be well, and you may go on with your journey."

"Well, I *do* call that kind," thought John. "What a fancy they've taken to me, to be sure! So odd, too, just as I was thinking how I should like to be one of them. I don't see what else I can do, and if I do stop out all night, the Doctor can't expect me to hop all the way to school on one leg; and I don't know how else I should get there, for I can't put this other one to the ground." Then he said aloud, "I should like it uncommonly, if I'm not in your way. Have you got room for me here in one of your tents?"

"Plenty and to spare," said the old dame. "Nancie, Lizzie!" and she called two children from under a

blanket; "go and sleep with your sister. Joey, keep still, my boy, and you shall share my bed."

"Well, if they were wild Arabs they couldn't do the thing better," thought John. "This is what they call the hospitality of the desert. I don't mind my hurt foot a bit. I think it's a regular piece of luck, giving it that twist. They'd never have asked me to spend the night with them else. Sha'n't I have something to tell those fellows when I get back! I don't believe there's one of them the gypsies would have treated in this style."

Supper was turned out in a great wooden tub, and the gypsies drew round to partake of it. The plates and mugs were of pewter, and the predominant flavor of the dish was of onions. There was a salt-dish, but no spoon, and the knives and forks were not cleaned so well as they might have been. John was very squeamish in such matters, and found his supper did not go down with quite the relish he had anticipated. One of the children came up to him, and John, who, like most good-natured boys, was very fond of little ones, was disposed to be friendly with it, till he saw that its nose was sadly in want of a handkerchief, and the clear moonlight showed that its face had not been visited with soap and water for a very considerable period.

"Pity they ain't cleaner," thought John. "If ever I have any real influence over them, I'll try and bring about a change in that matter; but it's only a trifle after all. They're such good-hearted, friendly, hospitable creatures,

that I ought to be ashamed of myself for thinking so much of these little failings."

He got into talk with them over his supper, and began "sounding them," as he expressed it to himself, about their royal family, and the position of the gypsies in general. They were rather reserved in their communications; one of the men, a tall, sturdy looking fellow, especially so. John took a fancy to this man, on account of his looks, and hearing him complain a little of the scarcity of common land in England, and the difficulty the gypsies had in finding any place where they could pitch their tents undisturbed, began talking to him about Canada and America.

"There would be plenty of room for you there," he said; "and the bisons and elks to shoot undisturbed. What a life that would be, to be sure! I wonder any of you gypsies stop in this pent-up little place, when there are thousands of miles of country for you to roam over as freely as you please." Then he gave them a glowing description of Canada and its lakes, the backwoods of North America, and the pampas and prairies of the southern part of the continent; hoping to inspire them with a desire to visit these new countries, where they might wander freely and untrammelled, and in imagination saw himself already the sovereign of the gypsies, leading them to peaceful conquest over untrodden plains and forests, which as yet had been known only to the elk or the bison.

It was quite grand; it ought to have warmed up the gypsy blood to a furious longing to follow where he was so willing to lead; but it didn't; the old woman only shook her head, and said, "There be no neighbors there, dearey, and we can't get on without them;" and the man, who looked strong enough for a modern Hercules, and on whom John had relied as his coadjutor, muttered something about it being "too hard work by half."

John felt disappointed, and when the old woman asked him if he would like to go to bed, he assented, feeling not merely tired out with his own eloquence, but very much disappointed at the little effect it had produced. "I hope," he thought as he followed her, "that when she talks of not getting on without her neighbors, she doesn't mean that she helps herself at their expense; it sounded like it."

He didn't find the little straw-stuffed mattrass and bolster on which he slept, quite so comfortable as his bed at the school, and he was afraid of feeling chilly if he undressed, so he lay down in his clothes; and there was a close stuffy smell about the blanket he pulled over him that was not pleasant; sheets there were none, and, altogether, his experience of uncivilized life as it is to be met with in England, was not a very agreeable one. Still he made the best of it, thinking "it was uncommonly kind of them to take me in. They wouldn't have done that now at a farmhouse, or any of those cottages I've passed. They're a regular good sort, these gypsies, although perhaps there's one or two things they're open to improvement in."

He slept soundly, and dreamed that he was in South America, and that a number of Indians, clothed in tiger skins, and with feathers on their heads, were dancing round him; that all the gypsies from England had come over, and were waiting on either side of him as his courtiers, and the old woman, who had entertained him that evening, was sitting by his side as his queen. From this dream he was awoke by a voice which was strangely familiar, and, looking up, he saw the moon and the stars shining right down upon him, as his blanket had been pulled away from over his head, and Mr. Vane was standing by, speaking to him.

"Get up, Ashdell, and come back to school," he said, which was rather a prosaic interruption to John's poetical dreams.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "How ever did you find me, sir?"

"This good man," said Mr. Vane, pointing to the tall gypsy, "imagined that you had run away from school—I hope not correctly, Ashdell—and, guessing that you came from Bessinghan, walked over, and informed the Doctor of your whereabouts. Was he right in his inference?" asked Mr. Vane, sternly; "did you really mean to crown all your follies by such an uncalled-for action as this?"

"Not a bit of it, sir," said John, shortly, and Mr. Vane felt sure that he was speaking the truth. "I'd have come on at once, only I hurt my foot—as he might have told you, the mean skunk! if he'd had any consideration in him."

"He did tell us that," said Mr. Vane, "and Mrs. Raven has kindly lent me her pony and chaise, in which to carry you back. But if you did not intend to run away, how came you to be so far out of your way?"

John told the whole story, which afforded Mr. Vane more amusement than he chose to display. He made no remarks, however, but assisted John into the chaise, and when they were settled in it, John saw him slip something into the hand of the tall gypsy.

"Treacherous scoundrel!" said John to himself; "after my placing the trust in him I did, to go and betray me like this! Now I shall have the credit of having run away, without having had the fun of it. What a nice lot of chaff I shall have to stand to-morrow!"

But John was mistaken there. When the morrow came, he was in no state for "chaff," or anything of a similar nature, being confined to his bed with a bad head-ache and a violent cold, the consequence of his first attempt at uncivilized life. He was a long time getting well; so long, that his mother came to see him, and as she wished to take him home, Dr. Raven was quite willing that she should do so, and at the same time informed her that, though he liked John, whom he really considered a very clever boy indeed, he would rather not have the charge of him for the future.

"He would be better at a private tutor's, my dear madam," he said; "it is utterly impossible for any master to look after him, who has the charge of above a hundred

boys besides. I shall always be pleased to see Ashdell, always glad to hear of his welfare, but I can't, in justice to my other pupils, accept the continued responsibility of his education."

So John went home, and was ailing and poorly for a great part of the summer. He was very much vexed at parting with the Doctor, and there were some of the boys whom he was really sorry to leave, but after a while his spirits revived, and his "ideas" began to flow again with their former vivacity. Bob came to spend some time in Studley, and, in conversation with him and his old schoolfellows, John began to feel himself again, and to speak of the boys at Bessingham Grammar-School with the contempt he was in the habit of evincing for all who presumed to differ from him. It was not very long before he got into mischief again, and what this was I must tell you in my next chapter.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN'S NEW THEORY ABOUT ANIMALS. HOW HE MET WITH A MONKEY THAT SEEMED UNTAMABLE.

JOHN seemed to think that after all there was a great deal more to be made out of the animal world than people generally imagined, but his "ideas" now took another shape, and this new fancy, instead of angling for birds or fattening calves, was training animals generally, or, as he called it himself, "elevating and humanizing the brute creation."

"I've an 'idea,'" he told Ted and Bob one day, "that a great deal might be done that way by any one who knows how to go to work. But no one does, there's the mischief of it. We treat the brutes just as if they *were* brutes and nothing more. Give them a bad name, and stick to it. Once in a way, people seem to find out the poor things are capable of something better, but they don't persevere, or if they do, they don't persevere in the right way. Some day I'll see what *I* can do in that way, but I hardly know which animal to select for the experiment.

"I wouldn't try a calf *this* time," said Ted.

"Drop that, please, Harley," replied John, rather testily. "It wasn't a fair trial, thanks to that precious Martha! What business had she to go interfering with the creature? But this is a question of far more importance than a mere matter of food; it's the mental and intellectual faculties of animals to which I intend to devote my attention now; but the question is, what kind of creature shall I begin with?"

"There was a deal of talk about the industrious fleas once," said Bob; "can't you catch one, and begin with that, John?"

"There's a difficulty about the feeding," observed his cousin.

"Just as there was about the calf's," remarked Ted in a low voice, which, however, John affected not to hear, and continued—

"Now, if you wouldn't mind helping in *that*, Bob—"

But Bob declined in so very decided a manner to have anything to do with the feeding of a flea, that John, who had no wish to undertake anything of the kind himself, was obliged to think of another animal as the object of his new process of development.

"I should like," he said, "to begin with one of the larger animals."

"A cow, this time," suggested Ted; "calves are difficult things to rear, by all I've heard of them."

"I'll punch your head, Harley, if I've any more of that 'chaff!'" said John, looking at Ted as if he fully meant

what he said, and as Ted, though by no means a coward, had no wish to quarrel with John, he prudently abstained from any further allusions to such a very tender subject.

A few days afterwards Ted had a whole holiday, and Bob, who had not yet returned home, agreed to go up with him to town in order to visit the Zoological Gardens, to which place he had never yet been. Ted, who had lived in London for the first twelve years of his life, had been there several times, but he was very willing to go again and show Bob not only "the lions," but every other notability in the place. John heard of the intended expedition, and wanted to go too, and his grandmother, having now quite recovered, told him if his mother would let him take a day from school, she would pay for his railway-fare and admission to the Gardens. Of course John got a holiday from his mother, who considered, as did Mrs. Thorne, that as he had been so good a boy during the illness of the latter, he deserved some reward. Martha had her own opinion on the subject of John's goodness, which she did not think it at all necessary to keep to herself. "It was just encouraging him," she said, "in his idle nonsense; there was no knowing what he would be up to next. A nice time she had had of it, turning dry-nurse to a calf! and the money Farmer Prowse had given for it had nothing like paid for the milk and oatmeal it had taken to keep the creature; and now, after all this waste, Master John was to go up to London, just, as she supposed, to get some more nonsense in his head!"

It really seemed like it. John was full of his new "ideas," when he went to the Gardens. If Ted and Bob had not held him back by main force, he would have got under the iron barrier before the larger animals, and endeavored to make the personal acquaintance of a tiger or a lioness.

He was furious at the way they were treated. "Shut up, poor wretches! in iron cages, just as if they'd done anything they deserved to be punished for. Was *that* the way to make them look upon men as their friends? Why couldn't they be treated with some degree of confidence, and have a little liberty given them, instead of being shut up like so many murderers?"

"Just to keep them from *being* murderers, I suppose," said Ted. "It's all very fine, young fellow, but if you were to have your way with these fellows, they'd very soon make mincemeat of us."

"That's just your old-world notions, Ted. People never seem to think you can do anything with dumb animals but by force. I'd trust them, I would; let them see that you think well of them, and see if they don't deserve it before long."

"Well, they might," said Ted; I don't know, but I should be sorry to trust myself with that tiger over there. Let's come and look at the monkeys; they're pleasanter animals to deal with than these fellows here."

Ted was really very glad to get John away from the vicinity of the lions and tigers, as he was afraid that, in spite

of Bob and himself, and even of a keeper who was looking sharply after Master John, he would go too near the dangerous creatures in his anxiety to prove the correctness of his favorite theory. Let the monkeys be as mischievous as they might, at any rate he could not get into a very serious scrape with them.

John had a deal to say about the monkeys. Their intelligence and vivacity pleased him greatly. So much might be made out of them, he said, if people only knew how to do it. He fed them with nuts, tried to teach them to shake hands, and stopped looking at them till Ted and Bob were quite tired of being there. There was one rather surly monkey on whom he bestowed a great deal of attention, and at last his assiduities seemed to have a little effect upon the rather acid nature of this unpromising-looking individual. He condescended to take a nut from John's hand, and even allowed him at last to rub his head, looking almost pleased with the delicate attention. John pointed this out in triumph to his friends.

"Now you see I've nearly conquered him, and it's all by kindness! He knows I trust him, and he's proud of being trusted; if I were to come here once or twice more, he'd get quite fond of me, wouldn't you, poor fellow? I do believe even now he'd let me do almost anything I like with him; just see—"

He stooped down quite close to the cage, and attempted to take hold of the monkey's tail; but this was more than Master John's new *protégé* would submit to. He

snarled, showed his teeth, and in a second had pulled John's cap off, while with the other claw he seized his hair, as if he would have liked to pull that off too. John roared with all his might, as I think any boy would who was in such a predicament, but the monkey grinned and showed his teeth more than ever. He seemed to think it capital fun, and so, I am sorry to say, did Ted, who, although he ran up to his friend at once, and did his very best to extricate him from the monkey's claws, was laughing all the time in what John could not help considering a very unfeeling manner. As to Bob, he stood quite panic-struck for a time; then he ran up too, but Ted by this time had got John away from the monkey, who rushed back to the topmost perch of his cage and sat there, chattering and grinning more than ever, and showing the cap in triumph, as well as a tuft of hair he had pulled out of John's head.

It was quite exasperating to see the way in which he behaved. He nodded towards the boys as if to show his delight at his prizes, then, after examining the hair, holding it to his nose and mouth and eyes, as if to ascertain its texture and fineness, he flung it on the ground, and began deliberately pulling the cap to pieces, and flinging the fragments where he had done the hair.

"Look at him, the villain!" cried John. "And it's my very best, too. Oh, if I could only get hold of you, you rascal, wouldn't I teach you to play such tricks as this!"

"Now, don't, Ashdell," said Ted; "try kindness; sup-

pose you reason a little with him. Don't you think he'll understand you?"

"Understand? oh, *he* understands well enough, the villain! He knows it's mischief, and that's why he delights in it."

A keeper came up, and John pointed out the monkey to him, but it was impossible, as the keeper said, for him to catch the animal in a place where it had so much room to go leaping about, and if he did catch him, where would be the use, the cap was quite spoiled by this time; the best thing the young gentleman could do, would be to go home at once for another, and the next time he came to the Zoological Gardens, keep further away from the monkeys.

John was not disposed to follow this advice, neither did his friends at all wish that he should do so; they had not seen half there was to be seen, so they left the monkeys and strolled about the gardens, John submitting to the inconvenience of having no cap, with tolerable composure. He did not make any further experiments on the animals; he said it was no use *there*, the creatures were so ill-trained and so accustomed to be treated as enemies, that they could not understand any one's wishing to be friends with them. Let him only have a fair chance—get an animal away from either cage or keeper, and all to himself, and he would show people what could be done with it. As it was, he should content himself on his visit to the Zoological, with only acquiring some knowledge of the "out-

ward forms and peculiarities of the creatures collected there."

He looked very dignified as he said this, and very indignant, and as if he had a right to be so, with the governors of the Zoological Society, and every person in their employment, for not ordering things better.

After a time, as he found himself rather cold, he tied his pocket-handkerchief round his head, which amused people a little, especially when they heard him gravely laying down the law as to the proper treatment of every animal he came near. Ted said he put him in mind of one of the judges with his wig on—indeed, I don't know whether he did not compare him to a late Lord Chancellor he had once seen—and suggested that he should mount on one of the garden seats and deliver a speech on the wrongs and rights of animals. But John did not receive this suggestion very pleasantly. Ted might laugh as much as he pleased at chancellors and judges, but John evidently thought it a very different matter laughing at him.

They left the Gardens in good time, as they were anxious to catch the 5:10 train, that being one which an omnibus always met at the Shedley station, and took people from it to the village, which was more than two miles distant. They were all to ride home, and as by this time they were very tired, they thought this a very sensible arrangement.

The day had been fine, and, for the season, warm—it

was now the middle of April—but a heavy rain came on soon after they were in the omnibus, which made the three boys congratulate themselves upon having inside places. The omnibus only held ten, and there were seven passengers besides themselves, all people who had been to business in town that day, and were returning home for the evening.

One of these passengers was well known to the boys, who had all a profound dislike for him; so indeed had most people in Shedley. It is curious what a nack some people have of making themselves obnoxious to every one with whom they come in contact, and in this not very desirable talent, Mr. Gruph particularly excelled. He was a short, thin man, with an unpleasantly red face, which made him look as if he was always in a passion, as indeed was apt to be the case upon the least provocation, and he had a surly, snappish manner of speaking, which was not calculated to impress any one in his favor. He had grumbled when the three boys came in, muttering something, evidently meant for them to hear, about a parcel of young monkeys being let loose without any one to look after them; and this little allusion of course was not very gratifying to the young gentlemen for whom it was meant.

"I wish he had *your* young monkeys to deal with," said Ted, not too softly to John; "though I should say that must have been an old one, to judge by its growling."

Mr. Gruph looked and felt uncomfortable. Did the boy mean him when he talked of an old monkey? And

growling; well, if he did growl, what business had boys like those to take any notice of it?

Presently John, who never could keep silence long together, began to talk over the events of the day, and Ted joined in, greatly to the annoyance of Mr. Gruph, who, if he did not exactly think the world was made for him, always imagined that special portion of it was wherein he happened to be. Every one else was still; there was two old ladies who kept a school, a young one who gave music lessons, her little sister, and the chemist and linen-draper of the village; and in the eyes of all these people Mr. Gruph, though a very disagreeable, was a rather important personage, whom they would not care to annoy by talking, if he chose to keep silence.

But the boys stood in no such awe of Mr. Gruph, and they chatted away as fearlessly and merrily as though he had not been there, greatly to his annoyance. But they had not gone very far when something occurred which irritated him still more than even their talk and laughter.

The omnibus was going slowly up a rather steep hill, when a female voice was heard from the wayside, and Mr. Gruph, looking out, saw through the rain a woman, with a baby in her arms, standing by the wayside. The omnibus lamps shone full on her as she came near, and the boys, who were looking out too, saw that she was thinly dressed, very wet already, carrying a parcel as well as her baby, and with no umbrella.

The omnibus driver stopped, with the intention of al-

lowing the woman to enter the vehicle, but Mr. Gruph, who hated babies, also disliked everything that bore the semblance of poverty, and this woman must be poor, or she would never be out alone on such a night with her baby.

"Smith! we can't have that woman in here! She's not a dry thread about her!" he called out.

"It's pouring with rain, sir," said Smith, stooping down from his box to the window, at which Mr. Gruph sat.

"Of course it is, and we can't have her to make us all wet through—giving every one of us our death of cold."

"She's got a baby, sir," pleaded Smith, who was a good-natured man, and had babies of his own.

"I know she has," said Mr. Gruph; "and do you suppose, Smith, your regular passengers are going to be annoyed by babies squalling in the omnibus?—besides, it's full, there's not a seat to spare."

"I'll take my little sister on my lap," said the young music-teacher.

"I'll ride outside," said John and Ted simultaneously.

"And I'll keep the baby quiet," said Bob; "babies are always good with me."

"There's no room outside, young gentlemen," said Smith; "but if you could manage to accommodate this good lady, as it is such a night—"

"I'll not have the omnibus overloaded! I'll inform against you, Smith, if you do!" growled Mr. Gruph, in a deeper tone than ever. "We're full! You're licensed to

carry ten inside, and you're punishable by law if you take any more.

The rain came pelting in at the window which Mr. Gruph had opened to talk to Smith, and he pulled it up sharply, telling Bob, who sat next to the door, to close it. The poor woman bent over her baby as if to shield it from the rain, and John—whose heart was right enough, whatever might be said of his head—jumped out, saying, "Take my place, ma'am, and almost before the woman was aware, Ted and Bob had pushed her, baby, parcel, and all, into John's vacant seat. The omnibus went on, and John ran by its side. Mr. Gruph got out at his own gate, after having grumbled all the way at the "damp stranger," who had been allowed to get in, to the discomfort of a regular passenger like himself. Then the omnibus went on, but stopped at "The Three Roads," a small public-house, where the woman and baby got out, and went up to a man who was standing under the doorway, as if expecting them.

Something dropped out of the woman's parcel as she went towards the inn, and John, who caught a glimpse of it, picked it up and ran after her with it. She was just inside the open doorway now, and her husband, as the man appeared to be, had taken the baby, and was observing how wet it was.

"Well it may be, poor dear!" replied its mother; "we should have been drowned outright, if it hadn't been for a young gentleman—bless his heart!—who got out and made me take his place. Why, if this isn't him. I am so glad,

sir, to have the chance of thanking you for your kindness. It would have killed my baby outright to have been out in the rain all this time."

John gave her the article she had dropped from her parcel, and she thanked him again, and went into the inn, while John ran homewards, feeling none the worse for his wetting, but wishing with all his heart that some bright "idea" would occur to him, whereby he might punish Mr. Gruph for the inhumanity he had shown that night.

"Talk of taming the brutes, I wish I could tame him—but it wouldn't be with kindness!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW JOHN TRIED TO CATCH A WEASEL ASLEEP, AND MARTHA CAUGHT HIM. AN UNPLEASANT BEDFELLOW.

A FORTNIGHT passed on, during which John did his best to carry out his new "idea" as to the proper treatment of animals,—a fortnight in which Martha's life was a misery to her, and she went about in daily fear of having some strange inmate brought into her kitchen, and especially recommended to her good graces. Of course such creatures as boys generally make pets of, would not have sufficed for John; rabbits, dogs, and pigeons, he disdained as tame, commonplace creatures, whose mental faculties, such as they were, had been developed to the utmost. But he brought in a weasel, with the intention, as he said, of trying if there was any truth in the proverb, "Catch a weasel asleep," and sat up all night watching the creature, with a view to elucidate that fact in Natural History. But whether the weasel went to sleep or not, John is to this day in ignorance, as Martha found him the next morning in a very peaceful slumber himself, with the weasel looking as lively as ever, and a candle nearly burned down to the

socket, with a wick two inches long. She put out the candle—and put out the weasel, too! carrying the cage outside and opening the door, when the creature very soon made its escape. Then she returned to John, woke him up with a good scolding, and told him that for the future she would come every night and see that he was in his bed, before she went to her own. Then he brought home a hedgehog, which he concealed from Martha, for, as he told Bob, "there was no beating any sense into her. She would be ten times more difficult to make anything out of, than any animal that ever came out of Noah's Ark; and the worst of it was, if they were dumb she wasn't, so, just for peace and quietness sake, he'd keep this creature in his own room, and say nothing about it to her."

The hedgehog got on pretty well for a day or two; John made it a little nest at the bottom of a cupboard where he kept his clothes, and fed it with bread and milk. But one night it walked out of the cupboard, as John had left the door open, and strayed into Martha's bedroom. One of the legs of her bedstead had broken that morning, and as the village carpenter had not been able to come and mend it, Martha had made her bed on the ground. She was in a sweet sleep, when the hedgehog, who thought perhaps that it would be warmer in bed with her than on the cold ground, crept softly in, and nestled up to her in the most confiding manner possible.

Martha twisted in her bed uneasily; something was pricking her, and, without waking, she turned on the other

side. The hedgehog, which had a great notion of warmth, crept up to her, and again she was conscious of an unpleasant sensation, as if a dozen pins were running into her at once, but this time in her back. She woke now, and was certain that the pin pricks were not imaginary, she felt them too palpably for that. Martha was thoroughly frightened—she was not a superstitious woman, but still, *what* could it be that was pricking her so sharply? She was certain nothing had been in the room when she entered it, and she was positive that she had closed the door before she came to bed. So she had, but the hedgehog was even then in her room, hiding behind a chair on which Martha had thrown a dress, which completely concealed it.

"There *can't* be pins," said Martha, "when I made the bed myself, and oh! good gracious! what else *can* there be? It's something alive, I'n sure of that! I can feel it moving as well as pricking! It'll bite next! that is, if it's anything belonging to this world, but perhaps it isn't, maybe it's come for a warning. I've heard tell of such things, but oh dear! I'd sooner have seen a shroud in the candle, or heard the death-watch a dozen times over, than I'd have had such a warning as this. I wonder whether it's for me or missis. Oh! oh! there it is again! and I daren't get out of bed for a light. I can't stand it any longer—I'll screech for missis."

So she did, with all her lungs. Mrs. Ashdell heard her, as well as John, who started up in haste. "There's something up! thieves, I shouldn't wonder; I'll run and pitch

into them as soon as I get on my trousers. What shall I take? My water-jug, and throw it at 'em—water and all. What a row she's making. It's very clear they haven't killed her yet. I'm coming, Martha, you needn't be afraid."

Mrs. Ashdell slipped on her dressing-gown, and lit her candle, then she went to Martha's room, followed by John, carrying his water-jug. Martha was sitting up in bed, screaming with all her force, and looking the very picture of fright, though what there was to be frightened at neither John nor his mother could see.

"I'm so glad you've come ma'am; I don't know what it is, but there's a something in the room that there hadn't ought to be. Oh! I feel it now, a pricking and a pricking. Master John, leave the room, do, and let me get up and dress myself!"

"I dare say it's only a pin," said John, "You're as full of fancies, Martha, as—"

"Not half so full as some one I could name. There it is again; I feel it now; it's a monster, whatever it is!"

"An overgrown flea," suggested John, who had not yet forgiven Martha the deception she had practised on him with regard to the calf.

Mrs. Ashdell came up to the bed and put her hand in; then she pulled out the hedgehog, screaming a little as she did so.

"It's Jack!" cried John, running up to his favorite, and embracing it, as much a hedgehog can be embraced.

Martha's indignation knew no bounds, and even Mrs.

Ashdell scolded John, and insisted upon his pet being dismissed the next morning, so John was reluctantly obliged to turn Jack adrift, and seek for another subject to experiment upon.

While he was deliberating which of the dumb creation he should honor by selecting for this purpose, he received an invitation to spend a week in London in company with Bob, at the home of another uncle of both. Bob and he had a fine time of it. They went up to the Monument and down to the Thames Tunnel, visited Madame Tussaud's, the Polytechnic, and many other places equally congenial to school-boys, but the best of all in John's opinion was the Museum. He would have liked to visit the Zoological Gardens again, in spite of very recent unpleasant experiences there; but Bob flatly refused to accompany him, and hinted that if he asked any of his other cousins to do so, he would tell his uncle "what a mull he had made of it last time;" therefore John thought it best to say nothing about the Zoological, and content himself instead with visiting the Museum.

It really was not a bad substitute, as John said "you could look at the creatures as long as you pleased, without their being able to hide themselves in the further parts of their dens, where there was no seeing them."

"Or clawing off your cap," Bob added, "and running off where there was no getting it."

John ignored this remark altogether, as he was apt to do remarks of a similar nature, and went from one animal

to another, scrutinizing its conformation as attentively as if he wished to learn how to stuff it himself. He was especially taken with a great brown bear. "That's a creature I should like to have the training of," he observed to Bob. "Give me a fair chance and no interference, and I do think something might be done with it."

"I'd rather you than me," said Bob; "they've a nasty trick of hugging, I've heard."

"It depends on the management," replied John; "tackle them the right way, and they can be brought to reason, like anything else. I only wish I'd the chance, Bob; I've an 'idea' I might do a great deal with a bear."

Their visit to the Museum took place on the last day of their stay in London. They were to leave by the 5:10 train as before, in order to catch the last omnibus at Shedley, having each a little luggage to carry home, besides a new kite which his aunt had given Bob, and a miniature steam-engine with which his uncle had presented John. These presents had given the latter very great satisfaction, more to him indeed, than to Bob, who was not altogether pleased when John told him that he had an "idea" he could do something with that kite of his. Benjamin Franklin had learned a great deal from a kite, but there were one or two things he had not quite found out about it. Bob, who knew nothing of Benjamin Franklin, would have been very well content to have flown his kite in his own fashion, which had always done very well; and his mind misgave him that if his cousin once got hold of it

the kite would be fit for very little afterwards. As to the steam-engine, John was sure that he should learn more about it than either Watts or Stephenson had ever found out, and was busy holding forth on the discoveries yet to be made in science, all the while they were in the cab which took them to the terminus. So full was he of these new thoughts, indeed, that he appeared quite tc have forgotten his theories of developing the intellectual faculties of the dumb creation, and even to have ceased regretting the want of opportunities of cultivating the acquaintance of a bear. There is no knowing how much Science might have gained, and Natural History have lost, had it not been for the singular chance which befell John while waiting at the terminus for the 5:10 train.

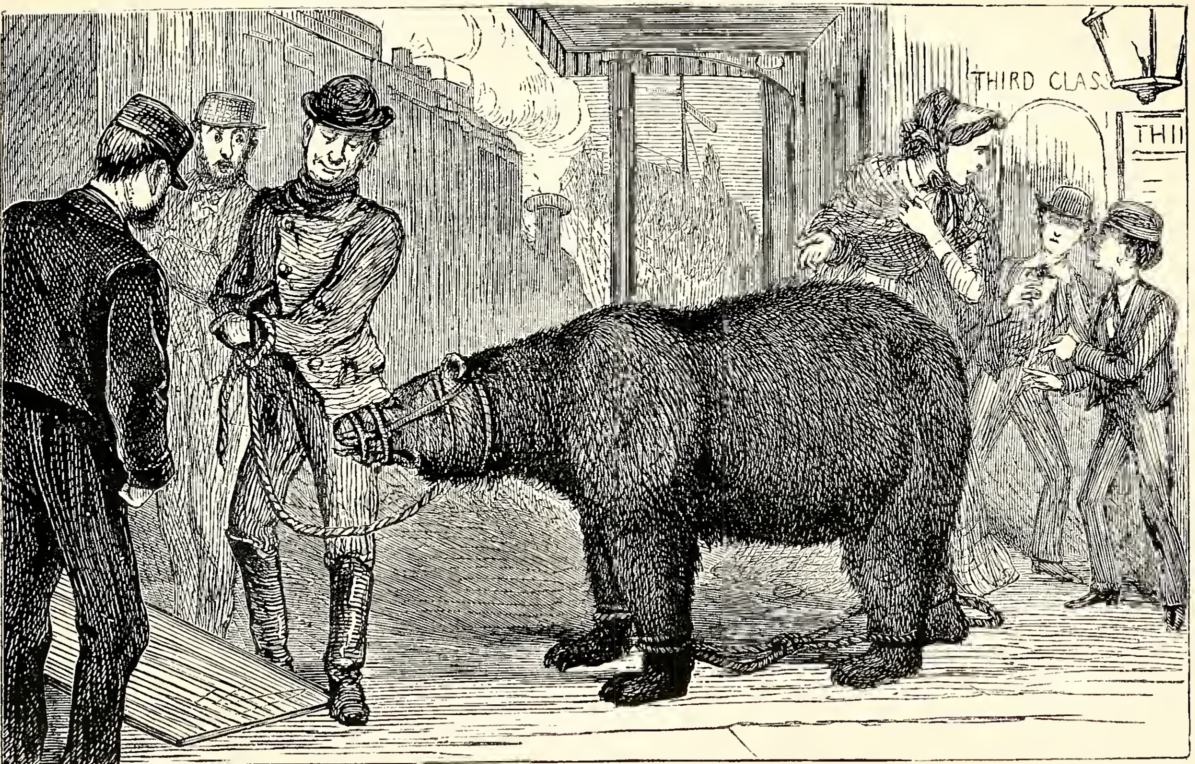
CHAPTER XIX.

HOW A BEAR FINDS HIMSELF IN BAD COMPANY, AND THE VILLAGE IS SCARED OUT OF ITS PROPRIETY.

INSTEAD of taking their places at once in the train, John and Bob stood at the entrance to the terminus watching the cabs drive up and the passengers alighting. There were still some minutes to spare before they started, when they saw a covered cart or small van coming up, out of which alighted the same woman to whom John had given up his seat in the omnibus three weeks before. The gas-light fell full on her face, as she got out of the cart, but she had no baby with her, and looked altogether more cheerful and in better trim than on the rainy night when John had befriended her. As she stood at the door of the cart, she turned and said to some one within—

"You're sure you've got him all safe?"

"Safe? yes, to be sure, and as tight as a trivet; and, if he wasn't, he's as mild as mother's milk, and might be trusted with a babby," said a man's voice from the inside of the van.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"I wouldn't like to trust him with mine," replied the woman, laughing as she spoke; and then she stepped into the booking-office, and came back presently with two tickets in her hand. As she passed the boys, she caught sight of John and recognized him at once.

"Good-evening, young gentlemen; how strange that I should meet you again!" she hesitated a little, then, her face brightening up, said—

"Perhaps you'd like to see him; he's the finest we've ever had—he's in there,"—she pointed to the van—"and we've got a lantern inside."

"What is he?" asked John eagerly; "a dog?"

"No, he's a bear; my husband is going to take him down by the rail to Studleigh. There's to be a fair there to-morrow; we've got a wild-beast show—the van's there to-day. I went down to settle about it that rainy night, and see about lodgings. I'm coming down to-morrow, and my husband's going down with the bear to-night. He only came up to the London Docks to-day, and the show would be nothing without him. He's the tamest creature that ever was, and such a big one!"

"Let me see him! Let me see him!" cried John, in a high state of excitement. "It's a bear, Bob; the very thing I've been wishing for; and tame already. I wonder how they've done it."

He was in the van while he spoke, and the woman who stood at the door said, "It's the young gentleman, George, as was so kind to me that rainy night. You'll let him see Buffer?"

"Yes, and welcome, as long as he pleases," replied the man, "only I think it's time Buffer and I was a going;—there's the bell ringing. Sorry to part good company, sir, but I must take Buffer in and give him a snug place in the horse-box. I must travel with him, they tell me, to make sure he's all right; but, law! they needn't fear, Buffer's as quiet as a lamb."

Buffer's master had got out while he was speaking, and then helped Buffer himself out of the van. Bob shrank back trembling, behind the woman, who went up to the bear and patted his shaggy hide as familiarly as she might have done a Newfoundland dog. Buffer was an enormous creature, and of a deep, blackish brown. For a bear, he had a pleasant expression, but both his hind and fore legs were secured by stout ropes, which, however, left him sufficient liberty to walk erect, and to make some use of his fore paws if so disposed. Two of the railway porters came up to escort him to his carriage, and his master led him carefully by a rope while his mistress walked behind. Altogether Buffer had quite a guard of honor, which was increased by John, who ran up to the man called George, and said eagerly—

"Let me go with him, do! I do want to see some more of a bear, I wouldn't lose such a chance for anything."

"Let him go, George," pleaded the woman. "Buffer's as quiet as a Christian, and wouldn't hurt anybody."

"Oh! I'm not a bit afraid of his hurting me," cried John. "I know how to manage him too well for that.

He seems pretty tame, but if he wasn't, I'd soon make him so."

"Well, it's more than many a youngster would do, to choose a bear for a travelling companion," said the man; "but he is quiet, and you've been very kind to my missus, so come along with us. I'll take care he doesn't do you any harm."

"Oh! I can take care of myself," replied John. "*He* wouldn't hurt me. Dumb creatures never do hurt those that know how to manage them."

They were in the horse-box by this time; John looked around for Bob, and saw him standing on the platform quite afraid to follow them, but evidently very much disinclined to travel by himself.

"Jump in, Bob," cried John; "the train will be off in a minute; get in; never mind the porters, they'll only think you're another keeper."

"Are you going, sir? take your place," said one of the porters; and Bob, hardly knowing what he was about, sprang into the horse-box just as the train was about to start.

He kept as far as he could from the bear, however, and presently looked fearfully up at its keeper, saying "Is he fond of hugging."

"Not particularly," replied George, otherwise Mr. Sims; "and if he does, it's all love and affection. He's the quietest creature going."

"Will he bite?" asked Bob, keeping as far as he could from the "quiet creature."

"Not a bit, unless it's his dinner; besides, he's muzzled."

"There you are," said John loftily; "you muzzle the poor fellow, and tie him hand and foot, and call that taming him! Taming him! why, you don't know how to do it. Now if that bear was mine, I should go to work in a very different manner, and I'd have him as gentle as a lamb in no time—fit to travel first-class along with the other passengers, instead of being shut up in a horse-box like this by himself, poor fellow!"

"And how would you go to work, young gentleman?" asked Mr. Sims, a little curiously.

"Treat him with confidence, to be sure. Take the muzzle off his mouth, to begin with."

"I'll jump off the train if you do!" shrieked Bob, looking aghast with horror.

"Don't frighten yourself, sir," said Mr. Sims; "the muzzle is not off yet."

"And I'd cut those cords. I should like that bear to feel that I trusted in him. I'd treat him like a gentleman; that's my idea, and then see if he wouldn't behave like one," said John, warming up with his subject. "Oh! if you'd only let me have that bear to do as I liked with, you'd see what would come of it."

"I expect I should," replied Mr. Sims. "No, no, young gentleman, we'll let well alone, if you please. Buffer's not a bad fellow, but he wants a little looking after."

John went up to Buffer, stroked his paws and his head,

and Buffer appeared gratified by these delicate attentions. Mr. Sims pulled out a short pipe and smoked thoughtfully for a few seconds; then, taking it from his mouth, observed—

"I'm afraid I shall have a bother about getting Buffer to the van at Studleigh. What do you think, now, sir, they'd charge for a cart to take him over there?"

"What do you want a cart for?" asked John; "isn't there the omnibus?"

"They wouldn't let him ride there," said Mr. Sims, "or else it would come a deal cheaper to take him over to Studleigh that way."

"Who'll hinder him?" asked John; "I wouldn't ask leave, but take him in just the same as any other passenger; and I know he'll behave a great deal better than somebody he's likely to meet with in the omnibus, and that's old Gruph, that row'd so because your wife wanted to get in with her baby the other night when it rained so."

"Oh, Mr. Gruph is likely to be in the omnibus, is he?" said Mr. Sims; "then it strikes me that anyhow there'll be one bear going by it, whether mine does or not."

"There just will," said Bob; and then John and he proceeded to narrate several very interesting anecdotes, not calculated to display Mr. Gruph's character in a very favorable light. Mr. Sims listened attentively.

"He's a nice man—very!" he observed, when they had finished. "Upon my word, I think my Buffer is much too good to travel in his company. If it was only

him in the omnibus, I shouldn't mind chancing it—if Buffer *did* give him a fright it wouldn't be more than he deserved. But, you see, the other passengers mightn't like it."

"There's never many of them by this train. Old Fripp's going for a wonder. I don't know what's made Gruph and him so late. They generally come by the 5:10, but I'm sure Buffer will behave himself like a gentleman, if they only let him alone."

"But, you see, there's the getting into the omnibus," said Mr. Sims. "People may cry out if they see a bear walking into it."

"But they won't see him," cried John; "couldn't we rig him out a bit?—throw a cloak over him, or put on one of your jackets. You've got your box here; isn't there anything we could fit him out with?"

Mr. Sims seemed to think there might be. It occurred to him as very probable, that he might get his bear safely conveyed in the omnibus, which would cost him much less than if he hired a cart, and if Buffer did frighten Mr. Gruph, there would be no great harm done. Accordingly he opened his box, and took out an old jacket and a wide-awake. He put the former on Buffer, untying the cord which secured his paws for the purpose, much to Bob's alarm, and then securing it again. There was a difficulty about the wide-awake. Nature did not appear to have intended Buffer's head for a hat, and the wide-awake wouldn't keep on, till John suggested tying it down with a handkerchief.

which would also assist in concealing the very peculiar shape of Buffer's face. There was a difficulty about his legs; Mr. Sims had a spare pair of trousers, but he doubted their fitting Buffer, neither did he altogether fancy the task of enduing him with them. John would gladly have done so, but Mr. Sims refused to allow him, but at last the difficulty was solved by Buffer's being judiciously draped in an old horse-cloth, which Mr. Sims had brought with him, and which, flung round him something like a Spanish cloak, caused Buffer to assume a very imposing and almost martial appearance. There was no light in the horse-box, but the moon shone clear and full, so that they could perform Buffer's toilet with every facility, and Bob looked on half-frightened, but still a little amused at the bear's metamorphosis, and thinking he should be very well pleased to see him hugging Mr. Gruph, if only he were quite sure that he wouldn't afterwards hug *him*.

They had only just finished Buffer's toilet as the train stopped. Bob got out first, and kept at a safe distance from him, while John assisted him out with the utmost politeness. Mr. Sims kept by his *protégé's* side, and John and he escorted him very carefully down the railway stairs. Bob ran on first, in fact he was hesitating whether he should not run all the way, and leave John in the exclusive possession of Buffer's society. He did not at all fancy riding in the omnibus with him, but still there would be Mr. Sims as a protection, and it was just possible that Buffer might turn some of his attention to Mr. Gruph; it struck

Bob that Mr. Sims would not be at all displeased if he did So, on the whole, he resolved to risk the ride with Buffer, in the hope that Mr. Gruph might make that gentleman's acquaintance before the journey was over.

There were very few passengers by the omnibus that night. Mr. Fripp and Mr. Gruph had already taken their seats in it when Buffer made his entry there. He was a well-behaved bear, and so made the entry in a more satisfactory manner than might have been expected. John, who had got in first, helped him to follow, and sat down by the side of his new friend. Bob came next, and got as far off as possible, taking his place by the side of Mr. Fripp. A bear must be an audacious one indeed, Bob thought, who would take liberties with him. Mr. Sims was about to enter next, when he remembered that he had left his box behind, and ran off to secure it. The train had started when he reached the platform, but his trunk was there, and taking it up he came slowly down, for it was heavy, and found the omnibus had started off without him. There was nothing for it but to leave the trunk behind for the present, and walk on without it.

Bob gave a faint cry of alarm when he found the omnibus going on without Mr. Sims, when Mr. Gruph uttered one of the little speeches that made him so popular in Studleigh, to the effect that boys ought not to be allowed to ride in public vehicles till they could behave themselves. Mr. Fripp blandly asked if Bob had hurt himself, to which Bob gave a faint negative, but added that they had left

some one behind, and he was almost afraid to travel without him.

"Now, then!" cried John, in a warning voice, and as he accidentally gave Buffer a slight poke as he spoke, that worthy emitted a faint growl, which made Bob tremble.

"He'll set him on to me if I don't mind," thought that unhappy boy. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! if the omnibus would only stop, I'd get out and run all the way!"

Mr. Fripp again repeated his inquiries, and Bob informed him that it was the friend of the gentleman opposite who had been left behind, and he thought it was very likely he would miss him.

"Not a bit of it," said John stoutly; "hasn't he got me to see to him? Do you think I can't take good care of him?"

"Is your friend an invalid, then?" asked Mr. Fripp. "A cold night for travelling, sir, if you're in delicate health."

Buffer only replied to Mr. Fripp's polite inquiries by another growl; not that he was angry with that gentleman for making them, but John was employed about him just now in a manner that rather disturbed his equanimity. He scarcely liked being meddled with by strange hands, and did not appreciate the kind offices John's were performing in cutting the bonds with which Mr. Sims had so carefully secured him.

For John had lost no time in carrying out his theory of treating Buffer with trust and confidence. He had asked

Mr. Sims repeatedly during the operation of dressing that personage, to allow him to leave his fore paws at liberty—"hands" John called them, with a delicate regard to Buffer's feelings; but Mr. Sims had met him with the excuse, "Safe bind, safe find;" and much other wisdom of the same kind; so now John made the most of his opportunity, and set Buffer's limbs at liberty, greatly to Bob's horror, who could just perceive enough of John's movements to guess what he was about.

"If he isn't letting him loose!" said Bob to himself, "he'll undo his muzzle next; here's a precious go! I wonder which of us he'll take to first. I can't get out, for I should have to pass him first, and he'll make a grab at me as sure as fun! I'd squeeze through one of the windows, but the omnibus is going so fast I daren't! If he'd be content with old Gruph, it wouldn't so much matter, but he's sure to tackle me, just because I'm the nearest. Oh, dear! oh, dear! if I only get out of this mess, catch me ever going out with John again."

Mr. Fripp again addressed Buffer,—whom, from the peculiar utterances he had made, he took for an invalid with a bad cold,—and remarked that he had come to a very healthy neighborhood. Buffer emitted another growl; he didn't exactly understand what John was about, and besides, the jolting of the omnibus was not agreeable. John would have freed him from the muzzle, but that was too delicate an operation to be performed without a better light than the moon—which every now and then was obscured by

clouds—could give, but he felt quite happy now in the thought that he had been able to restore Buffer to part, at least, of the liberty of which he had been so unjustly deprived, and patted him on the shoulder in the most friendly manner possible. John was intensely happy. Here was the very opportunity he had been longing for. A real live bear to fraternize with, to improve, develop, and civilize! What a happy chance it was that Mr. Sims had left his trunk behind, and thus left him free to make the best of Buffer!

The omnibus came to a bad bit of road, and jolted unmercifully. Buffer, who from the first had been perched in rather an uncomfortable manner, was thrown forward by it, and fell head foremost almost on Bob's lap. That wretched boy gave a shriek of agony, and clung wildly to Mr. Fripp.

"Keep him off! keep him off!" he shouted. "John, John, don't let him eat me up alive!"

Mr. Fripp was thunderstruck by the liberty Bob had taken in flinging his arms round his neck in this unceremonious manner. Mr. Gruph asked Bob indignantly what he meant by such behavior, and threatened to stop the omnibus and tell Smith to turn out the drunken passenger.

"He isn't drunk!" cried Bob, holding Mr. Fripp more tightly than ever; "oh! don't I wish he was! He's going down to the wild-beast show, and he's no business to be here at all."

"Of course he hasn't!" said Mr. Gruph, indignantly

"A travelling menagerie keeper! If Smith goes on taking such people as this in, I shall discontinue to patronize his omnibus."

"He won't hurt," cried John, "if you'll only let the poor fellow be. Here, Buffer, Buffer, get up."

He drew Buffer back by the rope which hung from his neck, to the other end of the omnibus. Buffer growled and Bob trembled.

"Open the door and throw him out. I tell you you'll be in for murder, John, if you keep him in here."

"Dear me! dear me!" said Mr. Fripp, "somebody must actually have trusted these boys with a madman. I suppose that was his keeper left behind."

"It was his keeper, sure enough," cried Bob, "but he's not mad; I only wish that was the worst of it."

Mr. Fripp looked—or would have looked, if there had been light enough, to see his face—aghast. He bent forward and whispered to Mr. Gruph, "Some desperate character escaped from the prison at St. Maur. Taking him back I imagine; but what a disgraceful thing for the authorities to entrust one man only with the charge of him. I'll make inquiries into it, and write to the *Times*."

"I'll tell Smith if he isn't more careful in his selection of passengers, his omnibus may give up running. What respectable persons does he think will ever travel by it if they're liable to be annoyed in this manner," replied Mr Gruph, in a tone which was echoed to the life by a growl from Buffer.

"Oh, John! John! don't aggravate him," shrieked Bob. "If you make him angry, there's no knowing what he may be up to."

Mr. Fripp and Mr. Gruph kept silence after this. They had both arrived at the conclusion that they were shut up with a murderer, or, at the very least, a daring and unscrupulous burglar, and that it would be as well to keep silence for fear of irritating him. Buffer travelled quietly enough, only now and then emitting a faint growl, at which Bob cowered with terror, and clung closer to Mr. Fripp. The omnibus drew up at Mr. Fripp's residence, and that gentleman made ready to alight; so did Mr. Gruph, though his house was a little further on the road, but he did not choose to remain any longer in such disreputable society than he could help. A gas-lamp stood just before Mr. Fripp's gate, and its light fell full into the omnibus. Mr. Gruph had a little curiosity to see the features of the supposed felon with whom he was travelling, and turned to look at him, then started back with affright, gasping—"It's—it's a monster!"

"No, he isn't," said John; "he's only a bear, and a well-behaved one too; ain't you, old fellow?"

He gave Buffer a slight poke in the ribs as he spoke, and Buffer gave a low but portentous growl, which sent Mr. Gruph cowering back into the furthest corner of the omnibus.

Mr. Fripp looked at Buffer; a look that ought to have reduced any bear to submission; but it had no effect upon

Buffer, who was thoroughly tired of the omnibus, and gave another growl. It was clear that the bear was worse even than the village school-boys—they did stand in some awe of Mr. Fripp, but Buffer felt none.

What was to be done? Mr. Fripp felt in a very uncomfortable position. He did not at all fancy the idea of passing the bear to get out; but dinner was waiting, Mr. Fripp was hungry, and not at all disposed to stop in the omnibus all night.

Buffer looked very formidable. Mr. Fripp thought that it would be better to give some other person the task of encountering him than himself, so he put his head out of the omnibus window, and called out, "Smith, there's a queer customer here; I think you'd better get down from your box and remove him."

Smith did not like engaging with "queer customers" any more than Mr. Fripp himself did; therefore he replied, with the utmost civility, "I daren't leave my horses, sir; they're the spiritedest pair I've driven for a long while, and there's no outside passenger left to hold them."

Then he stooped down to the window of the omnibus, and called out aloud, "Get out there! do you hear? What do you mean by annoying the gentlemen?"

"*He's* quiet enough, Smith," said John, "don't be frightened. Besides, if the worst comes to the worst, he can only hug; he's muzzled and can't bite."

Then he gave Buffer another push in the ribs, which set him growling again, to Mr. Gruph's horror, who sat down,

trembling all over; but that did not last long, he recovered himself sufficiently to tell John he would have him punished with the utmost severity of the law, to say nothing of a good caning from his master; swore at the bear and John too till he was redder in the face than ever, and only stopped when fairly exhausted for want of breath. A crowd had gathered round the omnibus door by this time, and they were all edified by Mr. Gruph's oration, when Mr. Sims, who had run after the omnibus with all the speed he could use, fearing for the safety of his beloved bear, came up and called out, "Is Buffer there?"

"Here he is, and he's behaved like a brick. I told you he would if he was only treated properly," cried John. "Mr. Sims, this bear is the most rational and intelligent individual I ever met with in my life. My knife was so blunt I couldn't cut all the ropes that fastened him; but, if you'll only lend me yours, I'll soon let him loose, and you'll see him walk out amongst you all, like a gentleman."

There was a cry from the assembled crowd, and a rushing back from the door of the omnibus. "A bear! a bear! a real live bear! shut in there alone with Mr. Gruph and Mr. Fripp. Boys, men, and women fell over one another in their haste to escape; instead of trying which should be nearest the omnibus, it was who should get farthest off. Never yet had Studleigh witnessed such a scene of confusion and dismay; and, if Buffer had not been the best behaved bear in the world, the uproar

around him might have driven him to the very measures which every one seemed afraid he would take.

Mr. Gruph swore more than ever, Mr. Sims heard him with as much composure as his bear, on whom, however, he kept his eye fixed, while he held uplifted a stout stick which he carried. John was highly indignant at this; and began a remonstrance with Mr. Sims on the injurious effect the sight of the stick was likely to have on Buffer's feelings, but his eloquence was drowned in the torrent of Mr. Gruph's words; and at last, when that gentleman again paused, Mr. Fripp leaned forward, and, addressing Mr. Sims, blandly said, "My good man, can you think of no way by which to remove this extremely dangerous animal from the omnibus, in order that we may leave it with safety."

"Of course I can, sir," said Mr. Sims, with the utmost politeness; "happy to do anything to oblige a gentleman. Buffer, Buffer, come along." Then he stepped up to the door of the omnibus, and taking hold of the rope round Buffer's neck, turned towards Mr. Gruph, "Hope you've enjoyed your ride, sir, as much as you did the night when you wouldn't let a woman with a baby in her arms get in out of the pouring rain. Good-night, sir," he added, turning to Mr. Fripp, "I hope my bear's not put you out of your way. But it strikes me you've travelled with a worse one than him before now."

Then Buffer descended, and was led off to the van, which was standing on a piece of ground rejoicing in the

name of Studleigh Heath; and Mr. Fripp, with a little of his usual dignity abated, left the omnibus; Mr. Gruph followed, vowing vengeance against Buffer, his master, and the boys; and last of all came Bob and John, the former making use of his liberty to run home with his utmost speed to Uncle George, and the latter full of his adventures with the bear, and his triumph. Mr. Gruph proceeded, at a more leisurely pace, to recount his exploits at home.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW FIELD OF ACTION FOR JOHN. HIS FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF WOODHURST.

IT shows how ungrateful people are (at least John always said so) to those who try to advance their views in any matters, but, after this last little affair, he was not nearly so popular in the village as he had been. Even Mrs. Ashdell saw it, and it vexed her very much. John's "ideas" had made people take an idea into their heads, and that was that he was a rather dangerous person to have to do with. There was no knowing what he might be up to next, as they expressed it; they felt quite afraid of him and his experiments, and openly said they were almost afraid to sleep in their beds as long as John Ashdell was in the village.

This grieved Mrs. Ashdell very much. She had lived so long in Studleigh that the thought of leaving it was very painful to her; while, at the same time, to feel that John, her bright, clever, handsome John, was not appreciated as he deserved to be, was almost enough to make her dislike the place and everybody in it. Uncle George

had a remedy; he said the best thing would be to send John to school again—a good sharp boarding-school, where the nonsense, as he expressed it, might be taken out of him. Mrs. Ashdell couldn't agree with him; she didn't herself think that there was any nonsense in John; it was only his way; he was a great deal cleverer than other people, only he had an odd way of showing it, that was all.

In the midst of her troubles and perplexities, there came a letter from an uncle of hers, who was a surgeon in a thriving little town thirty miles from Studleigh, on the same line of rail. He was a widower, his two daughters were married and had left the neighborhood; and, feeling lonely, it had occurred to him that if his niece came to reside in Woodhurst, it might be a good thing for them both; she might live with him and keep his house. He had always been fond of her, though of late he had seen very little of her; but he remembered that she had a son, and, before committing himself further, he thought he should like to see what this son was like. Boys were not always desirable inmates in a quiet house, as the doctor very well knew. He had had some as pupils, and trouble enough with them. No; before asking John's mother to reside with him, he would see what John himself was like. therefore he suggested that he should come and stay with him for some months; there was a good grammar-school in the neighborhood; John might attend it, and improve himself in Latin and Greek, which his great-uncle suspected he was not so forward in as he might be. The change

would do him good,—the town was by the side of a river that entered the sea seven miles off, and the saline breezes, softened by their passage over the land, made Woodhurst, in Mr. Sumner's opinion, a pleasanter residence than the seaside itself. In the autumn he hoped that his niece would come and stay a month or two with him, and at that time, if he found John was as endurable as could be expected of a boy, he would ask Mrs. Ashdell to take up her residence with him, and bring up John, if he showed himself adapted for it, to his own profession.

Uncle George liked the notion of John's going to Woodhurst very much. "People will forget all about his pranks when he's no longer in the way to remind them what a noodle he is." And his grandmother was pleased at the thought of his going to stay with her brother, but she spoke of it in quite different terms to what Uncle George did.

"Something will come of it, Mary, my dear," she said to her daughter. "Brother Phil will see what John is, and be delighted with him. That boy's thrown away in a village like this. They are so much behind the time, and he being so far before his, of course they don't understand him. Brother Phil will; and, you'll see, he'll want to take him into his business, and John will do well at it. Well! he'll be as famous as Abernethy or Liston, or any of the gentlemen that attend Her Majesty—I'm sure I can't think of their names, but I know they're all baronets at the least; and there's no reason why John shouldn't be a baronet too,

and a credit to his family. I don't mind what they say, my dear, I have such faith in that boy!"

That was the worst of it. John wouldn't have been half such a goose as he was, if his grandmother, and his mother too, had not had such "faith" in him. If possible, they believed in him even more than he believed in himself, and, knowing this, Uncle George was doubly anxious that the boy should leave Studleigh for a time. Woodhurst had a great many more people in it than the little village where John had spent more than half his life; the Grammar School would be much larger even than the one which John had attended at Bessingham; and altogether it seemed to Mr. George Ashdell that the boy would be likely, at last, to find his level, and learn that there were a few persons in the world, besides himself, who knew how things should be done.

John himself was delighted at the thoughts of going. He was an affectionate boy, and sorry to leave his mother but even that could not destroy the pleasure he anticipated. Like another Alexander, he saw new worlds to conquer. Here would be people who had never heard of him before to impress with his views and notions as to how matters should be managed,—people whose own notions would not be so cramped as always were those of dwellers in a little village,—John now looked with a little contempt upon Studleigh, and wondered how he had borne with the ignorance of its people so patiently as he had done.

He promised to write to his mother very often, and she

in return said she would send him all the news of the vil lage every week. She made him a great cake to take with him; had a new suit of clothes made for him; looked over his shirts; gave him a new Bible; and so at last let him go, seeing him off by the railway, and waving her hand to him as he was borne out of sight.

John was rather low-spirited at first; but the novelty of travelling through a fresh country, the importance of paying a visit, and the pleasure to which he looked forward from that visit, soon drove his depression away. The train was a quick one, and before he thought they could possibly be at Woodhurst, it had stopped, and John saw a gentleman near the carriage door, who he thought must be his great-uncle, though he had not seen him for above four years, when he had paid a visit to Studleigh. John was right; it was Mr. Sumner, and he held out his hand as John jumped out of the carriage.

"I thought I knew you again, though you've grown very much, but that was no more than I expected. Come along, here's the gig: jump in, and we'll be home in a trice."

Mr. Sumner was a great contrast to Uncle George, who, as the saying is, would have made two of him. He was a small, slight, wiry man, with grey heir, a rosy face, and a pair of the keenest, brightest eyes, John thought, that he had ever seen. He liked his uncle's appearance on the whole. "Looks sensible," said John to himself, "and as if he wouldn't take a dislike to a notion, just because it was not his own, or nobody else had heard of it before."

The town looked bright and lively as they drove through. It boasted of one omnibus and half a dozen cabs. People were bustling to and fro in a different manner to that in which they went about Studleigh, and John, as he looked about him, began to feel as if he had come amongst folks, at last, who were likely to appreciate him.

They were not long in reaching Mr. Sumner's house. He had his shop, or surgery—as his daughters, who were both now married, liked to call it—in the front, and his private door round the corner. The old gentleman led the way through his shop, and stopped to ask the assistant —who was so pale and thin that John thought he must be in the habit of taking more physic than agreed with him—if he had been wanted while away. While they were talking, John looked about him and wondered if out of any of the bright bottles he saw in the window he could make some fresh combination which would cure everybody's ailments. Then he saw a little machine on the counter, and incautiously laying his hand on it, the assistant turned a handle, and John found himself tingling all over with the suddenness of the shock he had received.

"Shouldn't meddle with anything in a doctor's shop," said Mr. Sumner, good-humoredly; "Knaggs, here, has a habit of paying people off if they do. Now come in to tea; shut the shop-door, Knaggs. People can ring the bell, if they want you."

Mr. Sumner did not rely very much upon his shop. He

kept it open because he had done so from the first, but he could have done very well without it. His daughters had long wished him to close it, because it was not genteel; and, oh! dear boys, if you've never lived in a country town, you don't know what a dreadful thing it is not to be genteel; but the old gentleman kept it on out of sheer habit, though, as he said, Knaggs shouldn't be disturbed at his meals to sell a sixpenny pot of cold cream; and if people wanted anything more serious, why, they could ring the bell for it.

Tea was ready in the parlor at the back of the shop,—cold ham, tea-cakes, and other things. John had made a good dinner only three hours before, so that he was not very hungry now, and he had plenty of time to talk, which he did. Mr. Knaggs, who had always an excellent appetite, sat and listened.

"I should like to know a little more," said John, "about that electrical machine of yours, uncle. I've got an 'idea' you can do a great deal with galvanism."

"So you can," said Knaggs, opening his mouth for the first time to talk; "I should have thought that little touch I gave you would have shown you that."

John felt rather disgusted. Who was Knaggs, that he should snub him like this—not much more than three years his senior? he didn't look above eighteen; perhaps it was that he was a doctor's assistant. "I'll back," said John to himself, "I'll learn all he knows, and a sight more, before I've been a month in the place. It don't seem as if I should get on well with that fellow."

"You'll have something else to think of for a time," said Mr. Sumner. "The Grammar-school opens to-morrow, and I want you to work hard at your Latin; the master here is great in that. Then I think if you were to attend the School of Art in the evening, it would be as well. Your mother tells me you've a great notion of drawing, but that you have not had much instruction. We've a good master at the School of Art, and I always say that every one ought to learn free-hand drawing just as they do writing. You never know how useful it may prove—"

"Just what I think," said John. "Indeed, I've got an 'idea' that if we could only draw well, we might do without writing altogether. Have a system of hieroglyphics, like the ancient Egyptians had."

"Ah! you go beyond me there," said his uncle, "though I dare say it would be quite as intelligible as the scrawls some people call writing;" then he poured himself out another cup of tea; that was his fifth! The little doctor drank more tea and stronger than any gentleman in the town. The eating he seemed to leave pretty well to Knaggs, who went on steadily at it. John continued:

"I don't quite agree with the modern notions about perspective, and light and shade. I think in the last matter the Chinese have some sense on their side, and perspective might be made a much simpler matter than it is. Now, I've got an 'idea'—"

"Better tell it to the master, Mr. Ray," said Knaggs, with his mouth full of tea-cake, "and see what he'll say to it."

"That fellow's a nuisance," thought John; "I wish I was big enough to lick him." Mr. Sumner looked amused His little bright eyes grew brighter and keener as he watched the two. Presently there was a ring at the bell. Mr. Sumner was wanted to see to somebody's boy, who had been climbing a ladder up which he had no business to go, fallen down, and broken his arm. Off Mr. Sumner went, leaving Knaggs and John together. "Make yourselves comfortable," he said, "while I am gone. I shall find you as good friends when I come back as if you'd known one another all your lives."

John didn't think so. He had finished his tea, but he sat and looked at Knaggs, who seemed as if he would never get through his.

At last he had done, and went back to the shop, where he amused himself with looking over a book—a medical one to judge by the pictures—and John finding an old volume of "Robinson Crusoe," the two passed the evening not very sociably till Mr. Sumner came home, and Black, the man of all work, put the shutters up, after which they had supper, prayers, and then to bed; when John dreamed he was telling Knaggs of the theory of perpetual motion, and exemplifying it by making him dance a hornpipe with the galvanic apparatus applied to his leg, and keeping him jerking up and down whether he would or not.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOHN MEETS AN OLD FRIEND. HOW BETWEEN THEM THEY ASTONISH THE NATIVES.

THE next morning John was down early and in the shop, where Knaggs was already busy compounding medicines. John offered to help him. Nothing he would have liked better if the other would only have trusted him; but that was what Knaggs did not feel disposed to do. John had to look on, while he spread plasters and mixed pills; and at last getting tired of this amusement, he asked Knaggs when they breakfasted, as he should like to take a tour round the town, and see what there was to be seen, if there was time to do so.'

"You've got a good half-hour," said Knaggs, "and I shall get on just as well without you as with you. I don't pound pills any the better for being looked at.

John thought Knaggs about the most disagreeable person he had ever encountered; but the truth was, Knaggs, though in years a mere boy, was one of the "old school"—a thorough Conservative, if you know what that is, boys; although Knaggs would tell you himself, he never med-

dled at all with politics; a lad who had little faith in anything new, who liked to go on the same beaten road from one year's end to another, and who looked upon John as a very dangerous and rather unpleasant person. He didn't like his "ideas" at all. He was not quite as much alarmed by them as the good people of Studleigh had been, for he meant to keep an eye upon John, and see that he did not meddle with anything in the shop; but then he didn't want the bother of keeping that eye, having — to use his own expression—quite enough to do without looking after anybody, and from all that John had said, Knaggs wouldn't have been at all surprised if John had wanted to spread poor man's plaster with brimstone and treacle, and make cough-mixture of soap and water.

"Well, I think I shall take a turn," said John. "Is there anything in the town worth looking at?"

"Not by you, I dare say," said Knaggs. "We're slow people down here. It can't be expected folks that come from London will think much about us."

"Oh! *I* don't come from London," said John, "though I've seen a good deal of it; Studleigh is much nearer to it than Woodhurst. I like London, though, pretty well; but it's too big, that's the worst of it, and the smoke's a nuisance. Such a waste, too. Do you know, I've got an 'idea'—had it for a long time, too—that a deal might be done with that smoke. I don't mean merely consume itself—that's nothing! but consume other things. Catch it; condense it; turn it back into coal again, and there

you are! Look at the saving! Look at the fuel you get!—an inexhaustible supply! And they're saying that if we go on as we're doing now, we sha'n't have coal enough to last us above another thousand years or so. What's to become of our great-grandchildren at that rate, that's what I want to know," said John, putting his hands in his pockets, and looking every inch a great-grandfather. "Some day I think I shall take out a patent for that notion. It'll pay. I see you've got a stove here; if I stop till the winter I shall ask uncle to let me try with that. It's safest to begin on a small scale, you know—"

"Have you done?" said Knaggs—he had left off his compounding and looked intently at John—"because if you have, I'll go on. But I don't want to be poisoning people, and I am likely to do it if this chattering goes on much longer."

"Don't trouble yourself; I'll go," said John, disdainfully. "It really seems throwing one's words away to waste them upon *you*."

Then he went out, wishing for Bob, who always appreciated him, or for Teddy Harley, who, if he did now and then quiz him a little, still seemed on the whole to have quite sense enough to enter into some of his "ideas." "Knaggs is a muff!" he said, "and a prig! and a mule!—an obstinate, piggish mule,—and while I'm in this place I'll have as little to say to him as possible."

If Knaggs had only known that, how thankful he would have been!

On John went, looking at the queer, old-fashioned little town; at the gabled houses and the red-tiled roofs, and thinking how different it all was from London, or the little village where he had hitherto spent his life. It was a thriving, prosperous little place, and the river was already astir with pleasure-boats and steamers getting their coals and provisions on board before they went off to London or to the neighboring seaport, which was fast rising in importance as a watering-place. There were people already taking the air on the quay, which was a broad gravel walk planted with trees. The breeze from the water smelled quite strongly of the sea; and John, as he sniffed it up, said, "I've got an 'idea' that this might be bottled somehow, just as they do perfumes. Why not? It would be uncommonly refreshing, and do one almost as much good as going to sea. It would sell too, amazingly—give it a Latin name, and a cut-glass bottle. What a fine thing it would be for any chemist to get hold of! I'd tell that Knaggs of it, if he wasn't such a queer fellow; but it's no good throwing away anything upon him."

On he went, noticing everything—the boatmen getting their craft ready for the day's work; the cleaning and loading of the steamboats; the people bustling to and fro, and thinking how much better he could do everything than anybody else was doing it, when presently he saw a tall, slight, gentlemanly lad, sauntering along with his hands in his pockets, and surveying all around with an air of calm, half-contemptuous indifference. He was sure he knew the

face and the figure. Was it—could it be Teddy Harley—and whatever brought him here? He ran up to him at once—"Ted! old fellow! is that you? What a comfort to have a rational soul to speak to!"

Ted deigned to show a little interest now. "How did you come here?" he said. "I came by the boat yesterday from London. We've been staying at Richmond on a visit for the last fortnight; then we thought we'd go to Fellrow for sea-air. The governor's been ailing, and they say Fellrow will just suit him. The mater and he are going by the omnibus there to-day, to look for lodgings. It's an idiotic little place, I should say," added Ted, superciliously. "Nothing goes direct to it but just that omnibus. No rail, no boat,—and we're to live there for a month. Some people, they say, live there for years! How they stand it, I can't think. It seems to me rather a sell, going there for one's holidays; still, if the governor's seedy, you know there's nothing else to be done. I wonder how we shall get through the time! Pick up periwinkles and throw stones in the water—that's the only thing that I see for it."

"I'll come and see you," said John, enthusiastically. "I'm down here staying with my great-uncle. I'm to go to the Grammar-school to rub up my Latin, and the School of Art to get up my drawing; but I'll find time to come and see you every half-holiday. What's seven miles for the sake of getting a little rational conversation!"

"Ah! I don't suppose you'll get much of that here," said Ted, gravely. "But what can be expected from a

country town, you know. I think all country towns are a hundred years behind the time,—and you're to go to the Grammar-school. Why didn't they send you to the great South Middlesex. I think that's the only place in the kingdom worth calling a school."

Ted seemed quite to forget that there were such places as Eaton, Rugby, or Harrow, and his speaking as he did of country towns may be accounted for by the fact that though for several years he had lived in the village of Studleigh, he, in common with most of the better-class resident there, regarded himself as a Londoner, and the pretty little village only as a suburb of the great city. He would have scouted the idea of his being anything but a metropolitan, because it took him half-an-hour by rail to reach the metropolis,—as would every gentleman who went to and from his business and his home by the same train that carried Ted towards his school.

"It's not a bad place," said John, "and I think I shall like it for a time. I suppose some of the boys at the school will have something in them, and I want to get on with my Latin. I wish you'd ask your governor if you could spend the day with me. It'll be a precious sight better than mooning about by yourself."

"So it will," said Ted. "I'll go home at once and ask him. Where do you hang out, — shall I come to you?"

"Do, and I'll show you Knaggs; he's the biggest muff that ever you saw. When my uncle makes a doctor of

him, I shall believe in making a purse out of a sow's ear." Then he told Ted where he could find him, and went back to breakfast.

Mr. Harley was very ready to let Ted spend the day with his friend. It was much better than having his company at Fellrow, or leaving him to roam about by himself; and Ted, having seen his father and mother safely off by the omnibus, proceeded at once to Mr. Sumner's house, where he found John eagerly expecting him.

The little doctor asked him to come in to dinner, and said that if he could spare the time afterwards he would take them both out with him. "I haven't many people to see to-day," he said, "and I think I shall get through my rounds this morning. Afterwards I'll take you and let you see what little our town has to show."

So he did; giving them first a capital dinner, at which Knaggs sat looking very melancholy, but eating all before him in a business-like manner. Ted made himself quite at home, showing off a few of his grand airs for the benefit of Knaggs, who had something else to do than to attend to them, and if Ted meant, as he had told John he wanted, to "astonish the natives," he certainly failed to do so in the case of Knaggs. Mr. Sumner was rather annoyed by the boy, though he was just as well pleased that John seemed free from any nonsense of the kind. "He won't be here long enough to do the other any harm," he thought to himself. "I shouldn't like John to take up with any of his notions."

It was not very long before he found out that John had quite enough of his own.

They went round the town, and Ted condescended to praise some of the shops, and said he should certainly buy a shilling knife in one of them,—people ought to patronize a place whenever they visited it. John and he had been by the river that morning, so the streets were fresh to them both; then they saw the Town Hall, which Ted said wasn't so bad, considering; and looked into the Museum, which Ted also deigned to praise. "It was a tidy little affair—very," he said. "Everything that was in it would go into one small room of the British Museum; but for a country place, it was very well." Then they came near a white brick building, with an imposing façade, four pillars supporting a pediment, and with "School of Art" inscribed upon it in large letters.

"Shall we go in here?" said Mr. Sumner, and in the boys and he went, removing a large curtain, and pushing on, in spite of the warning placard which said, "Students only Admitted."

They were in a large, dreary looking room, with sketches and unfinished paintings round the walls. Casts of fruit, and busts, and birds on the shelves; and several long, narrow tables, at which three or four students were at work. It was lit by three tall windows on one side, and on the opposite was the fire-place, which seemed quite inadequate, and certainly was so, to warm so large and lofty a room. Altogether the appearance of things was not at-

tractive. There was no teacher or master present, and the boys looked about them a little while, and then began to think it time to come away.

"If it's as slow as this every time you come here, you'll have enough of it," said Ted. "Those are such solid-looking fellows over there. There don't seem any chance of getting up a spree with any one of them."

"It don't seem to me," said Mr. Sumner, "that people come to school for the mere sake of having a spree; though, by what I hear from the other end of the room, something very like one is going on there."

There was a curtain drawn across the further end of the room, and from behind this, one could hear voices and laughter. "A pretty way of giving lessons," said Mr. Sumner, who was a little of the old school, and a great adviser of discipline. But the truth was it was not lesson time at all, only a few of the students had come there to practise, and the master, with some more of the advanced pupils, had just finished a drawing from the life. This was something over and above the school routine, and, therefore, the young ladies who had been at work considered themselves entitled to indulge in a little conversation.

"This is Mr. Ray's room," said Mr. Sumner, "but I suppose we may go in;" and, pushing aside the curtain, in he went, followed by Ted and John, who were a little amused by the scene which met their eyes.

There was the model and the lay figure, and they were both so alike that at first you could hardly tell which was

which. The model was an old man who got his living by working on the quays, or gardening, and having rather a fine face, long grey hair, and a wonderful power of sitting still without moving a muscle or even an eyelid, it had occurred to Mr. Ray that he would make a very good subject for his pupils to draw from. Simon Stone was ready to sit still as long as he was wanted at a very low price—it was a much easier way of getting a little money than by either of his ordinary avocations, and let the young ladies chatter as they might—and they certainly *did* chatter, if they were quiet in lesson hours, because in the great school-room they were too far apart for conversation, they made up for it when they were in Mr. Ray's smaller apartment—still Simon Stone never smiled or moved? he might have been a man of marble, he was so impassive. And he did for so many characters—either a beggar, a smuggler, or saint, according as the drapery was arranged, but to-day he had been taken in his real character, that of a gardener, with a spade in his hand and a basket of vegetables by his side.

Some of the pupils wishing to have a longer time than the others required, to study the dress and "accessories" (by which they meant the basket of carrots and turnips and spade), Simon had been asked if he could not lend some of his old clothing for the purpose of investing the lay figure in it, and to this he had agreed; and having brought a suit of fustian, that was certainly past any one's wearing but a wooden figure, who wouldn't want to move about in it, Mr. Ray and he had solemnly invested the model with

it, placed the spade and the basket just as they had been placed by Simon himself, and then called in the young ladies to see the figure.

One of the young ladies improved it directly. She had brought an old grey wig with her, which was private stage property, used at home in charades, and having placed this on the figure, and Simon's old battered hat on the top, it was generally agreed that it was hardly to be distinguished from Simon himself, and this had called forth the laughter which had sounded so out of place in Mr. Sumner's ears. Simon himself stood looking grimly on at his duplicate; he always had his clothes cut in one style, and made of the same coarse kind of stuff, and those that he wore were just as dirty and patched as those he had supplied the lay figure with. The hat was the exact fac-simile of the one he had on, only there was a great hole in the crown, which, however, nobody could see when it was on the figure's head, and the grey wig was so like his own grey hair, that any one not in a position to get a good sight of the face, could hardly tell which was Simon and which was the wooden figure dressed up in his garments.

The young ladies—there were four of them—looked shyly at Mr. Sumner when he came in. The master stepped forward, and Mr. Sumner introduced John as a future pupil.

"Have you had any instruction at all?" said Mr. Ray, who looked good-humored and intelligent, and to whom John's heart warmed at once, as it always did when he thought he had met with anybody capable of understanding

him. John said that he had not, "but I've thought a great deal about it. I always had an 'idea' that a great deal more could be done by drawing than has ever yet been attempted. As I was telling my uncle this morning, it is only another way of writing, only you do it with paint instead of pen and ink—that's all. I always had a notion, ever since I went to the Museum, that the Egyptians had a great deal more sense in them than they get credit for. I mean the British Museum, of course; I've been to yours in this town; it's a tidy little place; but, of course, you haven't got much in it."

The young ladies stared all the time at this notion. Mr. Sumner looked at his nephew in amazement. How ever had his mother brought him up, and where did he learn all this trash? John felt full of confidence; it was wonderful how much confidence the sound of his own voice always gave him, and he looked about him at the model and at old Simon, who stood all the time as grimly and stiffly as his wooden fac-simile, and then turned to the master.

"I'm not to draw from the life, I know, sir. Free-hand drawing is the thing my uncle says I'm to go in for; or else I've always had an 'idea' there's more in the Chinese notion of painting faces than we give them credit for. They're a wonderful people, you know! and I do think we've no business to laugh at them, as we always do, for not shading their portraits; Nature doesn't shade hers! We ain't black on one side and white on the other. The

same with perspective; I think we're wrong altogether in our notions about that."

"Perhaps you'd have us go to the Chinese, then," said his uncle, "and take the willow-pattern plate for our example in high art. What do you say to that, Mr. Ray?"

"I think our young friend, here, will find before he has been long in the school that he has something to learn as well as to teach," said Mr. Ray, good-humoredly. "I don't quite agree with his idea at present—'tisn't to be expected you know; but if he does develop any with which I *can* agree, I shall be very ready to tell him so. When is he to begin?—to-morrow, Mr. Sumner? the sooner the better. I think my new pupil and I shall get on very well."

"I'm sure of it," said John. "Ted, are you going away to-morrow? If so, I may as well begin work at once."

John felt as if he should like Mr. Ray; there didn't seem to be any nonsense about him; and Mr. Ray felt very much inclined to like John. Everybody else did, unless, as in the case of the good people of Studleigh, his ideas had made them rather afraid for their personal safety. He was so good-tempered and open, and, with all his confidence in himself, so free from impertinence, or any idea of giving offence, that for a time at least he was sure to win upon everybody. He did so now: all the young ladies, who were several years older than him, took to him at once, so did Mrs. Bligh, the superintendent, who looked after the school in general, and the young ladies in particu-

lar; she turned to John directly. "He is come to teach us everything," she said to herself, with a little amusement; "but I do like the boy for all that."

Mrs. Knight, who kept the rooms in order, was the only person present, with the exception, perhaps, of Simon Stone, who did not approve of the manner in which John spoke. She was a little woman, with a pale face, and she stood and stared while he talked, opening her eyes to their widest with as much amazement as if he had been talking treason against Church and State. John did not see her—Mrs. Bligh intervening, and she was every way a contrast to her subordinate, looking comfortable and good-tempered enough, as he said afterwards, to be everybody's mother, though she had never had boy or girl of her own; "she's a good sort," said John to himself; "I shall get on all right with her; so I shall with the master; and I like the look of the girls, too, if only they don't hinder one with talking—girls are always such sure hands at that."

John needn't have troubled himself. The young ladies, as a rule, never entered the school in the hours appropriated to the male pupils; so, unless it was on an occasion like the present, he was not at all likely to see much of them; but as to talking, it would have been a clever girl, indeed, who could have done much of that when John was in the way. He looked at the model again. "He's a rum-looking guy," he said, turning first from Simon to the wooden figure, so that neither could tell to whom the compliment belonged. "I suppose he's dressed like that to save keep-

ing this old gentleman standing. Not a bad notion, but I've an 'idea' I could improve upon it."

"I should like to know whether there is any one thing in the world which you couldn't improve upon," said Mr. Sumner, testily; to which John modestly replied, "Well, I don't think there are a great many."

"We're open to a hint," said Mr. Ray, good-humoredly.

' Well, if you could make him jointed, so that he could move his limbs, and sit down or stand up," said John, who had never even seen anything of the kind before, and did not know all its capabilities.

"Oh! it will do all that," said Mr. Ray; and he made the model extend its arms, sit down and stand up again, and take several attitudes, which, compared with Simon's stiff immovable figure, were perfectly absurd. John opened his eyes, and said solemnly, "It's a wonderful thing!"

"Pooh!" said Ted, in his loftiest manner; "it's only a great Dutch doll!"

"You don't see its capabilities—you don't see what may be made of it!" said John, enthusiastically. "Only apply the motive power to that—steam—electricity—let it be what you will, but you make a live man of it at once—a live man who can dig and plough, and make bricks I shouldn't wonder, and build houses, break stones, saw wood, anything but eat!"

Then Simon Stone opened his mouth, which he always did as stiffly as if it were pulled by a wire, and said, without raising his eyes or looking at anybody in particular:

"Hey, I alles thout poor folks 'ud be better wi'out stum-micks—t'aint half their time they gets nigh enow to fill 'em with."

It was as new a thing for Simon Stone to talk as it was for John Ashdell to keep silence. People would hardly have been more surprised if the model had opened its mouth. John, however, was too much interested with his new "idea" to take much notice of him, and as Simon re-lapsed into his customary rigidity—which, if anything, was a little stiffer than the model's—went on:

"Look at the saving in labor! look at the endless both-er and worry you get rid of! Always a man by you that you can set to do anything you like, and when you've done with him just give him a rub down, and put away. I never knew anything like it! I only wonder people didn't think of it a thousand years ago; but I suppose they'd no idea of the right motive power—the proper impetus required. I don't myself see quite clearly what that should be, but I know it can be done; only let me have a little time to think, and I'll master it."

"I've no doubt you will," said Mr. Sumner, "and every-thing else that you can think of. Don't you think you'd better come away now. I fancy you've astonished these young ladies and Mr. Ray quite enough."

John looked around him compassionately, as he always did upon people who were not able to appreciate his ideas, and he began to think his great-uncle Sumner was likely to be as unpleasant as his uncle, George Ashdell, in Stud-

leigh; but he went away, bidding every one present good afternoon with his usual politeness, and as he left the school, Mrs. Bligh sunk on a chair, with her round, good-humored face crimson with the laughter she had been keeping down, almost shrieking out, "That boy will be the death of me, if he comes here, Mr. Ray; the place will be hardly safe with him in it."

Mr. Ray laughed. "I don't think it's quite as bad as that;" and the young ladies begged Mrs. Bligh to inform them of any fresh ideas that the new pupil might have. They were so impressed by them, that nothing would have pleased them better than for John to have attended the school at the same time as they did, in which case there would not have been much work done; while Simon Stone, who thought himself very much aggrieved, and looked upon John already as something worse than an incendiary, opened his mouth again to say, "The school 'ud be a sight better wi'out su h as he—wantin' to starve poor folk, an' make wood an' iion do the work that flesh and blood was sent into the world for."

CHAPTER XXII.

JOHN WALKS OVER TO FELLROW, AND UNFOLDS HIS LAST "IDEA" TO TED.

"I THINK you've astonished the natives in there," said Ted to John, when they had left the school.

"I shall astonish them a deal more before I've done with them," said John. "That idea of mine's a first-rate one. I lay I'll make my fortune by it some day. Only give me time to carry it out in a proper manner. But I ain't quite clear as to the right motive power. I shall want to think about that a little."

"I must leave you for a little time," said Mr. Sumner, presently. "I have a couple of patients I must see this afternoon. I wonder whether you'll be safe to find your way home without any misadventure," he added, looking doubtfully at John.

"No, uncle," said he, "don't be afraid; I could clear it in three skips and a jump. It's not like London—I had an 'idea' the last time I was there, that if the streets were only rearranged and fresh named after a notion of mine, it would be much easier for people to find their way about than it is now."

"I'd write to the Board of Works, if I were you," said his uncle; "but, however, I hope while you're thinking of the fine things you can do in London you won't lose your way in our little town. I think you had better go back now and rest. I shall be in to tea, and Knaggs will give you a book or two to look at if you want it."

"All right, sir," said John; "Ted and I never want any books when we've got one another."

"Well, I don't suppose you do," said his uncle, looking curiously at him, and then he went his way, and the boys theirs.

"It's a first-rate idea," said John, who was full of it, as he always was of everything fresh. "Just look what a deal of good you may do it by it, if only properly carried out. All the nasty, dirty, disagreeable work of this world done by man-machines instead of man; all the going down in mines and the working in pits, the drudging and delving in hail, rain, and snow taken from men who can feel, and done by men who can't. It's the best notion I've ever had, and I've had a few in my time."

"Yes, you have, and every one has been the best."

"Never mind, I was working my way to better things. There is something like that in some verses I've read, about folks rising on stepping-stones, I think it was,

"'Of their dead selves to higher things.'

I don't know who wrote them. Was it Shakspeare or Tom Hood?"

"Tennyson," said Ted, who was better up in the poets than John.

"Ah, well, they just suit me, my past little mistakes were *my* stepping-stones; 'dead selves,' you know, that I've done with now; and I'm going to do better things. This machine-man, if I can only find the right motive force, will be one of them! If I succeed in it, I shall be satisfied if it's the only one. I think I shall have done enough then."

"I think you will," said Ted.

"Now, don't you go throwing cold water upon it," said John, who didn't quite like Ted's tone. "That's the worst of being an inventor, and before one's time; commonplace people—at least, I don't mean to say you're commonplace, Ted, for you're rather a clever fellow in your way—but still, those that *are* commonplace can't understand me, and it's very disheartening, if one's ever so full of faith in one's self. But it was always the way; just look at Galileo—"

"Well, he didn't try to harness a pig."

"Would if he'd thought of it, I dare say, but it didn't occur to him; and Columbus, poor fellow—"

"He didn't want to fatten a calf upon sawdust."

"And that man that discovered the circulation of the blood; I forget his name—"

"I should say you made a good many people's circulate pretty quickly when you turned a bear out loose on Studleigh Heath," said Ted.

John's pleasant, good-humored face became overcast.

It was not often that he was angry, but he really was so now. "Just you shut up, Ted!" he said shortly; "we don't want a row, but I'm not going to stand any more of that chaff. I don't do that sort of thing with you, and you wouldn't like it yourself if you were me."

Ted was very sorry he had vexed John. He was so good-tempered and good-hearted, that it really seemed a pity to do so, and, without teasing him any more, he followed him into Mr. Sumner's shop. Knaggs had left it for a minute, and John was glad of an opportunity of looking round without the chance of his interference. He opened one or two jars and peeped in, he looked at the different pots and boxes on the counter, and at last, espying the galvanic machine, cried with sudden exultation, "I've got it!"

"Got what?" said Ted. "What's up now?"

"The motive force that's to set the machine at work and turn him into a man! Here you are: this galvanic battery will do it. Just apply that, set him going, up goes his arm, down comes his spade, and there you are!"

"That won't do it," said Ted. "A little steam-engine's the thing you want. It's no good just giving the dummy a shock and have done with it; what you want is to keep him going, and if you keep giving him a succession of shocks, it seems to me you may just as well do the work yourself, as keep turning the handle of this thing."

"There it is; that's what I want to find out; how to keep giving a succession of shocks without the trouble of turning the handle of the machine. I know it can be

done, but of course one's got to find out how. That'll require time and thought. Never mind; Rome wasn't built in a day. I shall do nothing but study this point as long as I'm here."

"How about your lesson?" said Ted. "I thought you were to work up your Latin while you are at the Grammar-school."

"Bother the Latin! What's that compared to such a discovery as I'm on the point of making? I suppose I must go to that precious school, but it'll only be a waste of time. Much good I shall do there with my head full of this."

"As far as that goes, I don't see that you will lose much; I have no great faith in these country schools myself," said Ted, superciliously. He could never forget the fact that he himself was a pupil of the South Middlesex University.

Knaggs came into the shop now, and looked angrily at John, who stood by the machine. "I should have thought you had had enough of that," he said; "perhaps, though, you'd like the dose you had, repeated."

John moved away, without condescending to answer him; and Ted and he went into the parlor, which, though it was behind the shop, was as pleasant and pretty a room as any in the town, looking upon a bright little garden, which was always kept in capital order. They sat down by the window, at which the roses came creeping in, and John went on:

"That fellow's a nuisance. If he was only out of the way, so that I could get hold of the thing and see how it worked, I should do. I don't want to go buying one,—I expect they're expensive,—and that Knaggs seems set upon it that I sha'n't get hold of my uncle's. He's a spite against me, that's it;—chaps like him always have against those that are cleverer than themselves. Never mind, I'll do him! see if I don't, before long."

"But I can't see what's the good if you do *do* him," said Ted. "It isn't a steam-engine,—that's what you want, you know."

"No, I don't; let me alone, Ted; I know what I'm about. Electricity is the motive power I require. I don't believe people half know what there is in electricity, myself. They think all it's good for is just to play tricks with and make a chap ready to jump out of his skin, just as that Knaggs served me,—mean skunk! It's so great that one can do more with it than one can with steam, I'm convinced, and you'll see, by-and-by, when I've time to think matters over, and work them out, whether I'm not in the right of it."

Ted half believed in John, who believed so fully in himself; and they sat and talked together a little longer, till Mr. Sumner came home, and they had tea; after which Ted said it was time for him to go, as his father and mother would have returned from Fellrow, and be wondering what had become of him.

"I shall write to you as soon as I get there, old fellow,"

he said; "and do come over and see me; and we'll have a bathe and a row, and be as jolly as mud-larks."

"And I'll tell you how I get on with my new schemes," said John, in a whisper, "if I can only cheat that fellow Knaggs;" and Knaggs not happening to look that way, John shook his fist at him, which was a great relief to his feelings.

"All right," said Ted; "tell me all you can about it." Then he took leave of Mr. Sumner and Knaggs, and went his way, and the next morning the omnibus carried him and his father and mother to Fellrow.

John had two or three days more of idleness, with the exception of one attendance at the School of Art, and during that time he took every opportunity to learn what he could of the galvanic machine. He also asked Mrs. Bligh to let him examine the lay figure, which she did, and was amply rewarded by the many improvements John suggested in it, merely for artistic purposes. He got on pretty well with his drawing, being really, in spite of all his nonsense, a clever boy; and then, he went to the Grammar-school. Here he did not do so well as at the School of Art. There was no Mrs. Bligh to humor him; and, although he abstained from favoring the masters with any observations as to the improvements he thought they might make in the school routine, the boys whom he honored with his opinions upon that and various other matters teased him unmercifully. He set this all down to their country ignorance; he certainly had lived in a village

nearly all his life, but then it was a village much nearer London than Woodhurst, and he had made so many journeys to the great metropolis that, compared to the Woodhurst boys, he almost felt as if he were a denizen of it. He got a few cuffs and kicks. The Woodhurst boys were not a bit better than boys in general, and I am sorry to say they were very ready to find an excuse to jostle and ill-treat the new-comer. However, John was pretty well able to hold his own, his hearty country training stood him in good stead, and good-tempered as he was, the boys after a time found it was safest not to go too far with him. And he, finding himself so little appreciated, took refuge in a sullen dignity, keeping aloof from his schoolfellows, and treating them when they came near him with a contempt that was grand to see.

Of course, he didn't get on very well with his Latin, that was not to be expected when his mind was for ever running upon the lay figure in Mr. Ray's studio, and the galvanic machine, which was to do such wonders with it. He could think of nothing else. He applied himself to his drawing, because it occurred to him that in the event of any improvements or alterations in the machine, it would be much easier to have them effected if he could clearly show upon paper what he wanted, than merely write it down or tell it; but as to his lessons, he got on so slowly that the masters, who, of course, knew nothing of his real capacity, set him down as the dullest boy in the school. I don't know what they would have thought of

him if they had only known one half that was passing through his head all the time he was poring over his Euclid or trying to construe his Virgil.

Ted kept his word about writing. Fellrow, he said, was very quiet, but a stunning place for bathing, lots of crabs, and a capital beach; when would John come and see him? John would have liked to go at once, but there were difficulties in the way. The head-master did not approve of holidays being taken,—he gave one himself the first Monday in every month; and John's uncle said he must wait for that. John consoled himself,—it would give him more time to develop his ideas, so that he could unfold them fully to Ted, and ask for his assistance in carrying them out; and so he went on, as I have said, till Ted had been three weeks at Fellrow, when at last he was free to walk over to that quiet little watering-place to see him.

He got up early—he was so anxious to see Ted—he had so much to tell him. He came down the stairs, and went through the shop without being heard by Knaggs. As he opened the door, the light fell on the galvanic machine, which Knaggs had placed on a high shelf out of reach. John looked at it longingly—"I'll get you down some day—that precious dog in a manger sha'n't keep you from me for ever."

Then he went on his way through the little town, which was waking up to life and getting ready for its day's work, and out into the quiet country road which led to Fellrow. He had had no breakfast, but the blackberries

were ripening on the hedges, and now and then he stopped and gathered them. He saw, as he walked on, the farm men going to their labor, looking, so many of them, bent with toil, and aged and furrowed before their time, and he felt full of a new pity for them. He was a good boy, after all, though a foolish one. I think if there had not been some real sound sterling goodness underlying all John's Ashdell's absurdities, people would never have liked him as they did. "My machine will do something for these poor fellows," he said. "When that comes out, there'll be no working twelve hours a-day for a couple of shillings. That'll do all the rough, dirty, hard work there is to do, and leave them only to guide it, and look on, if they like, with their hands in their pockets."

John didn't ask himself what was to become of all the surplus laborers whom his machine would drive out of the field, or think that a farmer would scarcely care to pay them just to stand and look on with their hands in their pockets;—such considerations would have been beyond him, but he went on all the more cheerfully for the thought that had just occurred to him, and when he was about half-way to Fellrow, he saw Ted, who had come out to meet him.

He was sauntering along with his hands in his pockets, looking just as dandified and supercilious as ever,—a little browner, and with clothes a little shabbier, for the sea-side does wear out things terribly, but still just his clever, languid, gentlemanly self.

"What a swell he always does look!" said John to himself; "but, dear me, if my machine answers, everybody will be a swell too. I *do* wonder it's never been tried—to think of man, that calls himself the lord of the creation, drudging and delving as he's done, when all the time he might get a wooden dummy to do it for him!"

Ted was very glad to see John, and showed it as much as he ever showed any emotion. "It's a treat to have some one to talk to," he said, in his grand way. "I don't think much of the people at Fellrow—how are you getting on with the natives at Woodhurst?"

"Pretty well," said John. "I don't like the school—"

"Pack of cads, I suppose," said Ted; "country fellows always are. I should say you'd learn Latin with a strong Eastshire dialect. One of our masters at the South Middlesex would have it we ought to sound it as the Italians did. I didn't agree with him myself. I like the English accent best, but I don't think I should like the Woodhurst brogue. You'll pick it up to a certainty, if you don't mind, Ashdell."

"Oh! I haven't bothered my head much about Latin," said John; "it's precious little of that I shall pick up one way or another. I've been thinking ever since you left me of that 'idea' of mine. What shall I call it?—I know there's a name for any new invention that's to do wonderful things, and is something quite fresh and original. Let's see—is not it Hegira?"

"Eureka, you mean," said Ted. "Ah! I thought you'd

have had some fresh notion by this time. Well, let's hear how you're getting on with it."

"Well, I'm not getting on with it at all, beyond thinking matters over. But I see my way now, if I can only get hold of that machine; and I shall want you to help me, Ted, when I do. I've settled everything; I've altered some of my notions from what they were just at first. You see I'm not above taking a hint or two from any one, and I feel that I can't get the full motive power I want without steam. Not steam altogether, but a combination of steam and electricity. Now the first thing is to get the steam-engine;—it's a pity I spoiled the one my uncle gave me."

"Yes, it is," said Ted; "a new one will cost a goodish bit."

"Well, yes, a new one would take a sight of tin, but I'm going to do it on the cheap. There's a fellow in our school's got a second-hand one; it's little, but a good one to go, and it's quite big enough to make an experiment with. Of course, I must experiment on a small scale;—that galvanic machine of my uncle's will be nothing, you know, when I come to carry things out; but that and the little steam-engine will do very well to begin with. Well, I'm going to buy this engine of Pratt; I have been saving up my money ever since I have been down; Pratt's going to let me have it for five shillings and a peck of apples Uncle gives me apples every day after dinner, and I put them in my dirty-clothes' bag to save for him. They're

not a keeping sort, and some of them are going to squash, but I don't see that Pratt's any business to mind that. A peck's a peck, you know, if you only get it full. Well, I get the steam-engine; I connect it with the galvanic battery; I place my wooden model under the joint influence of both; when it begins to act—of course not regularly or usefully at first, but still it *does* act. There's that great point settled, and I only want time and ample materials which of course my uncle or anybody—say the public in general—the Mayor of the town, they say he's a brick and got lots of tin,—or the Government, but I don't think Government is ever liberal to inventors; but anyhow, somebody or other is sure to come forward and help us, when once the thing's known, to make our fortunes, and immortalize ourselves. No, Ted, when you and I are gone, they'll put us in a Biographical Dictionary and Westminster Abbey!"

"Me!" said Ted; "what have I got to do with it?"

"Oh, but you will have, you know; if you are going to help me, and of course you are, I shall let you go shares with me. The thing is, can you come over for a day and night to Woodhurst? I must try my experiment at night, when every one's out of the way, you see; perhaps Mr. Ray wouldn't mind, but then people are sure to interfere and make remarks. I did think at one time Mrs. Bligh would have helped me, but the worst of her is, you never can tell when she's in jest or in earnest; so what is to be done

had better be done between only you and me, then we shall have all the glory and all the profit."

"All right," said Ted, "if I can get over I will; but if that Knaggs keeps his eye so on the machine, how will you get hold of that?"

Knaggs is going to have a half-holiday next Wednesday week,—a half-holiday, and sleep out, and come home by the early train in the morning. He's going to see his grandmother, who lives ten miles off, and he's to get all his stuff—pills, and powders, and the whole—made up before he goes, and I'm to mind shop in the afternoon."

"It's to be hoped nobody will be coming to you to make up pills or powders," said Ted, "or there'll be a coroner's inquest."

"There you go, Ted! Now I didn't expect that of you. I don't think it's right by a friend who's going to do the handsome by you, and let you go shares with him in his new invention. That's the worst of you, Ted; you're a clever fellow, but you never seem to think that anybody's got any brains but yourself."

"Oh! *you've* got brains," said Ted; "I never disputed that, only the worst of it is, you don't always know how to make good use of them. However, let's hear what you're going to do when Knaggs has his half-holiday. Do you want me to come and help you to mind shop?"

"Yes, I asked my uncle if you might, and he said yes. Knaggs don't like my being there at all. That fellow's got a regular spite against me. I think that if it wasn't that

uncle told him that he ought to go and see the old lady he'd rather lose his holiday than I should be in that shop Uncle don't seem to mind him. He says there's nothing I can do much harm with unless I try experiments on myself, and if I like to see how jalap and rhubarb go together with a dose of asafœtida for flavoring, I'm welcome; anyhow, he says it's hard if I cannot serve a pena'orth of castor-oil or a packet of violet powder without making a mess of it. I've been enough in the shop to learn as much as that; so Knaggs is to have his holiday, and I wish him joy of it! Then you come over in the morning, and after dinner we shall have a quiet time of it to ourselves. Uncle will be in and out, or in the back-parlor reading, but that won't matter,—Knaggs will be out of the way, and there's one comfort, he can neither lock up the galvanic battery nor take it with him."

"And how will you get it to the school, and do all the rest of it?" asked Ted.

"I'll tell you all about that by-and-by. Is not this Fell-row just before us? Let's talk of something else now, and when we've had some breakfast, we'll look out for a nice place on the beach, where there's nobody within hearing, or at any rate where we can see them if they come too near, and then I'll tell you what I think about doing."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JOHN MATURES HIS SCHEME. HOW THE COAL-HOLE HAS A COOLING EFFECT UPON TED.

JOHN had a nice day of it at Fellrow. He bathed, threw stones in the water, saw what little—and it was very little—there was to be seen in the place, sauntered on the beach, climbed up the rocks in the distance, then came down and saw the people picking up coprolites for manure. Of course he had something to say about this, and made more than one of the ragged boys who heard him open their eyes at the extent of his knowledge and the long words he used; and, above all, he told Ted how he meant to carry out his experiment on the eventful night when Knaggs would be absent from Woodhurst. As this will be unfolded in due course, there is no occasion to dwell upon it here; it is enough to say that Ted agreed to do what he could to help on the plan, and that his parents gave him permission to pay John a visit on the Wednesday week, and spend the night in Woodhurst. Ted was very ready to go. He had not much faith in John succeeding in the experiment, or that he should ever make his fortune,

or win a place in Westminster Abbey at his death by helping him; but he thought it would be a spree, and Fellrow was just dull enough to make him feel quite ready for anything of the kind.

John rode home on the top of the omnibus. He would have walked to Woodhurst as well as from it, if he could have had his own way, for he was anxious to save all the money he could for his great experiment; but his uncle would not hear of this, and had given him a shilling for the purpose. There was only room on the roof, but that suited John all the better. He could look about him, and talk to the coachman, which he did, giving that worthy several hints as to the best mode of handling the reins and feeding his horses. He was thoroughly tired out by the time they got to Woodhurst, and glad to get to bed at once; and the next morning he awoke all the better for his breath of sea air, and in excellent spirits at the idea of his promised assistance.

He thought the time would never come to an end, between that day and Wednesday-week. At first he thought of counting the hours and notching them on a stick, that he might see how many he had got through; but contented himself with tying a handkerchief into knots, and undoing one on the morning of every intervening day. He had plenty to do in the mean time—a great deal too much, to think of his Latin or his other scholastic duties. He went to the School of Art three times a week. Mr. Ray was always there, so was Mrs.

Bligh; but after the first, that lady refused to let him have anything to do with the lay figure—"You'll be making it go upon wheels, or jerk it with strings," she said; "and we're quite content with it as it is."

The figure still wore Simon's dress. Mr. Ray was anxious to make a finished full-length likeness of the old man, and the school taking up so much of his time, he did not make very rapid progress with the painting. So the basket and spade still remained, and the figure itself looked exactly as it did the first time John saw it.

Simon himself was frequently about the school now, though just at present not required as a model. Mrs. Knight was in the habit of employing a girl to do the drudgery of the school-room under her directions, and the last girl having been worse than any of her predecessors—and, according to Mrs. Knight, they had all been bad enough—Mrs. Bligh, who knew Simon was in need of work, suggested that he might sweep out the rooms and clean the windows in his spare time, till a suitable damsel could be found. Mrs. Knight engaged him for the purpose, and, accordingly, Simon's tall, gaunt figure, looking exactly like the one in the studio come to life, was to be seen pretty often by the students. He never spoke to any of them—hardly ever to Mrs. Knight. He brightened up a little when Mrs. Bligh bade him good-morning or good-night, and uttered some sounds from the depths of his throat, that might be supposed to be in answer. But John always thought that when he had made his model

move, and go about the different avocations that Simon now performed, it could scarcely do them more like clock-work than Simon himself did. He hardly went to the school to draw at these last few lessons, though he sat with a pencil in his hand and his paper before him. He was absorbed in calculations and plans, and intently employed in taking note of everything around him, with a view to the carrying out of his experiment on that eventful day, which seemed as if it would never come.

It did come at last, though, and Ted with it early in the morning. He had followed John's example, and walked over; he would have preferred riding, but the omnibus did not leave Fellrow for Woodhurst till ten o'clock, and Ted was impatient to hear how John was going on. Therefore, after an early breakfast (Ted couldn't get up in time to start without his, as John had done), he had started off, and a little after eleven was in Mr. Sumner's shop, asking Knaggs—who was diligently pounding away—where Ashdell was.

"Not home from school yet," was the answer; "and as likely as not, won't be till one. He's been kept in every other day regular, lately," he added, with a delight that struck Ted as almost vicious. "You can go in the parlor and rest, if you like, and there's the *Eastshire Mercury* to look at."

"I don't care for a country paper," said Ted, loftily; "haven't you got the *Times?*"

Knaggs said "No," and went on with his pounding

He seemed disinclined to talk, or Ted would liked to have practised a few of his grand airs upon him. As there was nothing else to be done, he went into the parlor, and tried to get what amusement he could from the pages of the *Eastshire Mercury.* But as it was not more interesting than country papers generally are, and Ted had had an unusually long walk, it is not to be wondered at if he fell asleep, and did not wake till John came rushing in.

"Here you are, old fellow! Had such a narrow escape from being kept in; precious glad I wasn't, though, as you're here. Has that Knaggs given you any grub? Of course he hasn't; he spites me, and spites my friends. What will you have? We dine at one o'clock, but won't you have some bread and cheese, and then come out for a turn?"

"No, thank you," said Ted; "I'm tired—I walked, and I might just as well have ridden, for I didn't think of your not being out of school before twelve. Well, how are things looking—got the steam-engine?"

"Hu-u-sh!" said John, looking fearfully in the direction of Knaggs. "If he has any idea what's up, he'll lose his holiday, if he has to sham ill to do it. Come in my room, and you'll see."

He took Ted to his own apartment, and unlocking his box, brought out a small brass steam-engine, of the kind that schoolboys delight in; then he set it working, which it did very well. "I only got it yesterday," he said. "Pratt found fault with some of the apples, but there were

a few over the peck, so I gave him those in. Here's the wire that's to connect it with the galvanic battery; so if I can only get hold of *that*, and carry it to the figure, I shall do. There's no evening school to-night, so we're likely to have the coast clear."

He had got everything in readiness—a dark lantern, which his uncle sometimes used when he went out in the evening, and a coil of rope.

"What do you want that for?" said Ted. "This looks uncommonly like housebreaking, you know. I thought the window we were to get in at was too near the ground for us to need anything of the kind."

"Ah! that's the window I first thought of, but it won't do. You see when I came to Fellrow I had only examined the inside of the school; since then I've been able to look round the outside, and I find we shouldn't be able to get to any of the large windows without being perceived. Now there's one at the back—a little one, and we shall have to squeeze, but we're neither of us very stout, and I know it's never fastened, and opens right into the studio. Now we can get through that without any one noticing us. Just below is a place that I suppose we may call a coal-hole, only it isn't a hole, just a yard where the coals are kept. Well, the wall of that is not high, and it's at the end of a court where there's nothing but the blank walls of warehouses on either side, so no one will see us climb over that. Well, we get into the coal-hole—"

"Blow the coal-hole!" cried Ted. "You never told

me anything of that. What a precious mess I shall get into, and look at my light trousers?"

"What's trousers when one's on the eve of a great discovery!" said John; "for, Ted, if we only make this answer, won't you be able to buy dozens of pairs, and have them made by the Prince of Wales's tailor?"

"That's all very fine," answered Ted; "but if it *doesn't* answer, my trousers are done for, and I shall get into no end of a row. Besides, I shouldn't like walking back into Fellrow looking like a coal-heaver."

"I'll lend you an old pair of mine," said John, "and wear my own black ones. Now, let me go on: we shall leave this soon after eight; the man shuts up the shop then; and uncle said you and I might go out for a stroll. We smuggle out the battery done up in brown paper; it'll be dusky by that time; besides, I'm not too proud to carry a parcel. We get over the wall and into the coal-hole; then we pile the coals up as high as we can—"

"I suppose you've got an old pair of gloves to lend a fellow?" said Ted, looking rather woefully at his hands. He didn't quite like the adventure into which John was leading him, as well as he had thought he should; there had been nothing said about the coal-hole that day at Fellrow. John nodded, and went on:

"Then there's this rope; you see I've made a noose. Well, there's an iron arm runs out from the school-house, just by the window; it held a lamp once, but they thought it wasn't needed—they're precious stingy here with the

gas; all the better for us. We throw the noose round it, in case the coals don't lift us high enough, pull ourselves up by the rope, get through the window, and there we are! there's the machine we're to make into a man! there's the motive force with us that's to galvanize it into life! Nobody in town has the least idea what we're about; and when we come back to supper, we shall be able to tell my uncle that we've made an experiment which is to bring us in thousands! I say, won't he open his eyes! He ought to stand champagne; and my opinion is, the least the town can do is to erect us statues in the market-place."

"Isn't there any one to take care of the rooms?" asked Ted. "I thought there was a Mrs. Knight who lived there?"

"She's up at the top somewhere," said John; "all the rooms below are given up to the school." In this Master John was wrong, Mrs. Knight having a very cosy little sitting-room on the ground-floor, opening right out of the larger one appropriated to the students. "She won't hear anything of us, come in," he continued; we shall have the place all to ourselves, and nobody any the wiser."

They were now summoned to dinner, where Knaggs sat, eating as much and saying as little as usual. Directly after, he went to dress, and came down presently, looking as John said, as much like a swell as he knew how, and, with a little ostentation, gave several keys to Mr. Sumner. "I've locked up all I can, sir," he said; "so, if

murder's done before I come back, I'm not responsible." Then he went away, leaving John and Ted masters of the situation.

Mr. Sumner was not very much afraid of leaving them in the shop. By this time he had begun to understand John better, and to like him more than he had at first thought he could ever do. He had charged John not to open any of the drawers, nor to attempt, if any one came in for medicine, to sell them any but what was ready made and labelled; and he was not afraid that John would disobey him. As to the galvanic battery, he had never given that a thought; if he had, he would have only said that if John meddled with it he would be punished for meddling, and therefore he went on his short afternoon round without any misgivings. Not many people came into the shop, but these John served with a gravity that was grand to see. As Ted told him, he would make a capital doctor, by-and-by, if looks went for anything; and the afternoon and evening passed on till eight o'clock came round, and Mr. Sumner told Black to put up the shutters, and advised Ted and John to go out for a stroll.

He went out himself, as he generally did of an evening, to the reading-room; and, as soon as Black was out of the way, Ted and John began to get ready to go too. The little steam-engine and other matters were already packed up, and by standing on the shop shelves they were able to reach the battery, and then, wrapping that up in brown

paper, John put his treasure carefully under his arm, and the two walked out, and in a very few minutes were in the court-yard, under the small window that opened into Mr. Ray's studio.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW JOHN AND TED WERE ELECTRIFIED INSTEAD OF ELECTRIFYING.

SIMON STONE was busy that evening in the School of Art. He had been at work in a gentleman's garden all day, and, having been home to tea, had now come round to sweep out the school, ready for the next morning. Simon rather liked this employment. He went to work much as if he had been sweeping gravel paths, and the bits of paper scattered on the floor were so many dead leaves. The room was very dusty to-night, and Simon opened one of the large windows at the side on that account. It was growing dusk, so he lit the gas that he might see what he was about, and went on steadily doing his work, better, it must be owned, than any of the girls whom Mrs. Knight employed had ever performed it.

As I have said before, there were three large windows on one side of the schoolroom, and these were the only light it had, with the exception of the small window in Mr. Ray's studio; but that, you will notice, was parted off from the larger room. Through these windows you could

see the workroom of Mrs. Vesey, the best dressmaker in the town. She employed a great many girls, and sometimes—not often—they were kept at work rather late, so that John could look up from his drawing and watch them. The workroom was lit by a range of windows, and, of course, when the light was failing, the girls drew near these windows. One, in particular, had a sewing-machine. John never saw her employed at that without thinking how he could improve it, and resolving, when he had perfected his machine-man, to try what he could do with a machine-needlewoman, who should do as much work as a dozen machines put together.

The roof of the workroom, which was on the first floor, was red-tiled, and, rising from a gutter, sloped upwards to a ridge in the centre. At the end of the room was a smaller apartment, occupied by Mrs. Vesey herself; and, as she kept here the dresses which were not yet commenced, along with ribbons, lace, or trimmings, she always locked it up at night when work was over.

The whole building was old, and so, indeed, was the School of Art, which had been originally the assembly-rooms, where the county balls were held; but they didn't hold county balls in the town now, and the owner of the rooms—a well-to-do brewer—found he could get a better rent for them by letting them to the town for a school, which hurt Mrs. Vesey's trade, and, she said, showed a great want of public spirit. However, that didn't trouble the brewer—perhaps *his* dancing-days were over; but, as

the school building showed evident signs of not being so strong as it had been, he shored up the walls on either side, and, between Mrs. Vesey's workroom and the school, great beams were placed, at the joint expense of himself and her landlord, so that the two old buildings helped to keep up each other—just as a couple of elderly people might do, who would both get on the better for taking care of one another.

Simon swept on, and presently he came to a sheet of paper, near the place where John always sat to draw, and, picking it up, saw a very fair likeness of himself, with something which Simon set down as a trap fastened to his foot. "That thar young chap has done it that's allers got so much tew say, an' thinks no folks i' the world had brains before he cum into it. I s'pose that's how he'd keep workin' people held fast, so as they shouldn't go about as quick as their betters. He's a good un, he is; I on'y wish I wor his marster—I lay I'd teach him a thing or tew."

Simon could never forgive John's wishing to supersede men by machinery. The prejudice has always been common enough amongst those of Simon's class, though it was rather hard that John should have called it up, as his intentions were at least kind ones. The old man went on with his sweeping in the same manner as before, but presently desisted when he heard a murmur of female voices and laughter at the outer door.

"It's Mrs. Bligh, I lay," he said; "she's a rare jolly un. What's brought her here? An' thar's a pack o' gals with

her, a-chatterin' an' buzzin' like so many bees, on'y all the work they do is playin'." Simon had a great dislike to girls —he liked them rather worse than he did boys, and, as he opened the door, he was not at all pleased to see several young ladies with Mrs. Bligh.

They had been out all the afternoon sketching, then had gone in and taken tea at the house of one of the pupils, and now had come to leave their drawing-boards at the school. It was beginning to rain a little, so Mrs. Bligh suggested that they should all go into Mrs. Knight's room and wait, after which she would take them to their different homes. They all came in, laughing and talking, till Simon's grim, sour face looked sourer and grimmer than ever, and swept past him into Mrs. Knight's little room, leaving him to go on with his sweeping.

Simon was disgusted at the noise they made. One of them in walking past had scattered the little dust-heap he had swept together. "It's no use goin' on with a pack o' whirligigs flyin' about like that," said Simon; "I'll go into Mr. Ray's room, an' see if I can be let in peace there."

So he did—lowering the gas in the large room, for he was a careful creature, and not lighting it in the smaller one directly, as voices outside struck on his ear, and he listened attentively.

"It's precious cold waiting here," was the first he heard, "and it's beginning to rain. I say, be quick, and shy up the rope, and let's get in." It was Ted who spoke, and Simon, not knowing the voice, set it down as a burglar's.

There was very little in the school to steal—no robbers could do very much with casts or drawing-boards; but Simon did not think of that—all he did think of was how to trap the thieves, and, to use his own expression, "sarve them out."

How thankful he was that he had not lit the gas, so that the parties outside might have no indication of his presence. It was still light enough for him to see the position of things; and as his eye fell on the wooden figure—such a strange, stiff likeness of himself—a smile, such as had not shone on Simon's face for years, lit it up now About a couple of feet from this figure was a large, old screen, behind which was stowed away a heap of miscellaneous lumber. Simon was strong and wiry, if old, and he lifted the wooden resemblance of himself behind this screen, and then took his place on the platform in precisely the same attitude that he had occupied. The basket and spade were by him; he pulled his shaggy, grey hair over his forehead, tilted his hat forward, and there he was—to all appearance the lay-figure dressed up in his own old clothes.

"They'll know *that's* here," he thought. "When folks come to break into a place, I reckon they pretty well know what they've got tew expect. I wonder if they'd any notion of running away with it. If they *dew* try that on, they'll find they've got a troublesome customer."

From behind the screen he had brought forward a large stick, which belonged to Mr. Ray. This he dropped at his feet; "Ready, if it's wanted," he said to himself, and then

remained grim and immovable as if he were wood indeed.

There was more whispering outside, then a shadow thrown against the glass, as some one seemed raising himself against the wall; then the long narrow window was pushed up, with some difficulty apparently, for he heard a voice that *this* time he recognized, crying out, "It's precious hard to get in. Now, mind how you hand up the things when once I'm on the window-ledge."

"Marster Ashdell," said Simon to himself; "what wickedness is he arter now? His fine talk an' his plannin' and schemin' seems tew hev brought him to summut."

Presently John was on the window-ledge. Simon's head was turned from it just as the lay figure's had been, so that he could see nothing of his movements; he could hear them, however—he seemed to be pulling up something, and Simon greatly wondered what it could be. He could hardly suspect him of stealing, but made up his mind he was bent on some wickedness or other, for which, if possible, he would punish him. Presently John dropped on the ground inside, and somebody else appeared to be at the window, and afterwards dropped too.

"I hope we haven't hurt them," said John, speaking of the battery and the steam-engine as tenderly as if they were live things. Then he stooped down and appeared to examine something.

The rain was leaving off, and the moon shone full into the room with a pale, watery light, but still sufficient to

guide John in his operations. "We sha'n't want a light," he said, "which is lucky,—it might show through the window. Get the matches handy; I won't set the spirits going till I've got everything placed ready."

"They've come here tew hev a bout o' drinkin'," said Simon to himself. "Tew think of a boy like that thar goin' in for anythin' of the kind. I wonder if it's gin he's brought with him. Whatever it is, I lay it'll do me a sight more good nor it will him."

He kept as still as ever, never turning his head, though he was longing to see what bottles had been brought. Presently he heard the clinking of glass and the clatter of metal, as John poured the spirits of wine into his engine. "They're goin' tew hev a reg'lar good supper! They've never come by it honestly, or they wouldn't get in here to eat it. The tarnation little vagabones! I wonder now what it is they've bin layin' hold on."

Simon's mouth watered, but he never moved. Presently John came near him, followed by his friend. Simon hoped they were going to spread their banquet at his feet; they were carrying something, but, without lowering his head, he could not see what. Presently Ted said—"Now for your Frankenstein, John."

"That's a new kind of meat," thought Simon; "I never heerd tell on that afore. I hope it's good."

"Don't talk," said John; "I feel so dreadfully excited."

"Never mind, we shall soon see whether or not you're to be another Prometheus. Have you got everything you

want? Now, I suppose I'd better leave you to put the finishing touches yourself."

"Yes, please," said John, in a voice that fairly quivered with emotion. "I'd rather be left all to myself now. Oh Ted, if it should *do!*"

"Seems in a hurry for his supper," thought Simon. "Thar'll be more tew eat on it than he reckons on."

John went to work with trembling hands. Ted sat on a low stool at a little distance, watching him. "I wonder if he'll make the dummy move at all," he thought. "Suppose it *should*, after all. Something might come of it, though not so much as Ashdell expects."

The steam-engine turned and fizzed, and at last moved the handle of the battery. "He's a cookin' somethin'," thought Simon, longing to see what it all was at his feet. John's heart leaped within him. "*That's* all right, so far. Now to connect the battery with the figure;" and then he began to attach a wire that he had wound round the galvanic machine around the leg of the figure before him.

That was too much! In an instant the figure seemed endowed with life. It had seized him by the collar of his jacket, and was beating him with the regularity of clock work, and with a force that spoke wonders for the effect of the galvanic machine. It had a stick in its hand, and it laid that stick on with, as John thought, ten-men power—as if it were threshing wheat, or knocking the dust out of a carpet, instead of beating a boy. John shrieked, partly with pain, but far more with terror. Had he only called

this dreadful thing to life to be murdered by it! Would it never leave off! Couldn't it be made to feel that it was not endowed with the power of movement merely to destroy its creator! He called on Ted to help him, but Ted sat mute and almost paralyzed with fear. He wished he had not made that joke about Frankenstein; he wished he had never meddled at all in this matter—there was something wrong here. John had been presumptuous, and interfered with things that he had no right to meddle with, and this was how he was being punished.

"Oh! oh! oh! let me go! let me go! I'll never try to make anything come to life again. Oh! oh! Ted can't you pull the galvanic battery away, or stop the steam-engine!" cried John, who firmly believed that his experiment had only been too successful. "I shall be killed outright, if you don't."

"I'm afraid to move—I'm afraid to lay a finger on it!" cried Ted. "As like as not it'll tear me to pieces!"

"Oh! you coward, Ted! You don't care about it tearing me! I shall be smashed into a jelly!—I'm sore all over! Oh, Ted! if you'd got into such a mess as this, I'd have stood by you!" cried John.

So he would. Ted felt sure of that, and he nerved himself to attempt his friend's rescue. To do him justice, if, like John, he had imagined that it was nothing *but* a machine with which he had to deal, he would have kicked the battery on one side, and wrested his friend from the clutch of the lay figure. But Ted was a little superstitious and

imaginative, and he felt there was something "uncanny," as the Scotch say, in the whole affair. The cold, watery moonlight, the casts and sketches around, the stillness of the deserted studio, only broken by John's cries and the measured "thud! thud!" of the stick, all added to this impression. But he mastered his fears enough to step forward and try to pull John from the grasp of the grim ghost that he had raised.

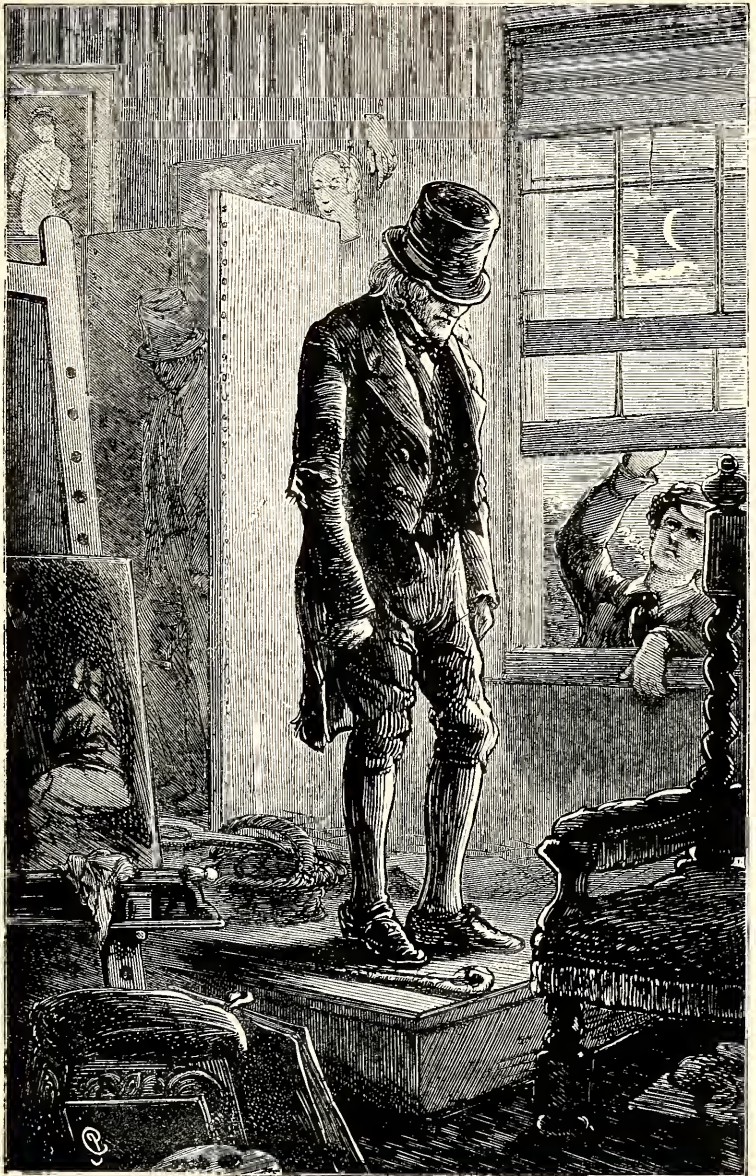
In doing so, without meaning it, he kicked the engine and the machine on one side. John heard the movement, and gasped out, "Now, perhaps, he'll leave off!" which Simon did, standing stiff and rigid as the lay figure itself, for Mrs. Bligh and her party of demoiselles had entered the studio, and Simon saw them, which the two unhappy boys at first did not.

The girls were almost as much frightened at first as Ted and John. Was it really the lay figure that was making the boy it held like a vice shriek so fearfully? Mrs. Bligh was not frightened at all—she guessed, directly, the trick Simon had played, and rather enjoyed it, though she did not recognize John's voice, never having heard it under similar circumstances before. She imagined a couple of lads had been breaking in with the intention of helping themselves to anything portable they could find in the school that might be worth taking, and that Simon had caught and punished them, and she quite approved of his doing so. She thought they had been nearly punished enough, but she could not help giving them a further-

fright, and therefore she said, in very distinct tones—"I think now we have only got to send for the policeman, and give these young men in charge for breaking into the premises."

The policeman! Ted looked up and saw, as he afterwards expressed it, "a whole lot of women" standing like accusing witnesses of the crime he and John had been guilty of. They had been breaking into a house! they should be had up before a magistrate, sent for trial to the sessions, have a jury and a judge, and all the dreadful force of the law arrayed against them! He saw it all in a moment—the disgrace, the shame, and what would be almost as bad, the laughter! What little sense Ted had left in him was fairly scared away now, and the only thought that presented itself was the possibility of escape. "Let's hook it!" he cried, frantically, and looked wildly up at the window by which they had entered; but Mrs. Bligh and her pupils had arranged themselves below that, so escape that way was impossible. He dashed aside the curtain that screened the studio from the school-room, and, seizing John by the arm, ran forward with the vague idea of making his escape by the door. No chance! there stood Mrs. Knight just before them with a lighted candle in her hand. A gust of the cool evening air came in through the window Simon had left open, and Ted rushed towards that, still dragging John, who was so bewildered by his bruises as to be content for once to play a secondary part.

In a second he was on the desks, then on the window ledge, above them, and holding out a helping hand to John Then, where should they go? Below the window was a yard walled in at either end. Ted rushed forward desperately, and was on one of the beams that shored up the two buildings. He crawled along it somehow, and was in the gutter, John following him mechanically, climbing along with hands and feet, almost as instinctively as a monkey does, sensible of nothing but that he was leaving behind the horrible mechanism which had beaten him so fearfully. On they went—luckily the gutter was broad and firm, till at last they reached the skylight that lit Mrs. Vesey's little room. Ted thought he heard voices behind him—detection, capture, all seemed imminent; in reality, it was only Mrs. Bligh, now in the school-room, calling out, as she tried to mount the window and look after them—"Bless those boys! I hope they won't break their necks." Hardly conscious of what he did, he dashed one of the panes of the skylight open, and sprang inside, followed by John, who rushed giddily forward, and then fell senseless at his feet.



CONCLUSION.

HOW JOHN MISSED HIS FOOTING AND FOUND HIS SENSES

MR. SUMNER saw nothing of his nephew that night, neither did he of his nephew's friend. He went to the river and inquired of the boatmen if they had seen any thing of the two lads he described: but no one could give him any information about them. Everything in the shop seemed just as he had left it, and he knew that John, let him do his best, would not have found it very easy to do much harm to any one. At last he missed the galvanic-battery, and then it occurred to him that they might have taken it away to make some experiment with, have injured it, and afraid to return. Possibly Master Harley had gone home to ask his father for money to replace it with.

"I hope his father will stop it out of his pocket-money," thought the old doctor. "I suppose Master John has made him a convert to one of his glorious 'ideas.'" However, he went to the different police stations and made inquiries, but still without any result. He never thought of going to the School of Art, as it was not an open night, or he might have heard something that would have set him on the

track of the fugitives; so at last he gave matters up and went home, expecting to see Master John to-morrow with a very penitent face, and possibly the remains of his galvanic-battery under his arm.

He went to bed—there was the night-bell if John and his friend did return. They could make themselves heard by that, and he slept undisturbed till the morning, when Knaggs made his appearance, and, on hearing the account of John's disappearance along with the battery, received it as a matter of course,—indeed with rather an appearance of satisfaction. He had expected that something would go wrong during his absence, and it was rather a relief to find that his expectations were verified, and he sat down and ate his breakfast with a better appetite than ever.

The two unhappy creatures in Mrs. Vesey's work-room did not spend nearly so comfortable a night as Mr. Sumner. John himself had hurt his head seriously in falling, and lay for a long time without speaking. Ted made him as comfortable as he could; took off his jacket and placed it as a pillow for him, and laid the table cover over him for a quilt; then he sat down by his side, feeling at liberty to indulge his reflections, which were none of the pleasantest. He had tried the door, and found it locked on the other side. There was no getting out that way. If they got out and went along the gutter, and dropped into the yard—not at all an easy thing to do—still they must be penned in by the high walls on either side, by no means

so easy to surmount as Mrs. Bligh imagined, she having given them credit, when she looked into the yard after them, for having escaped that way. She had certainly said they must be as good at climbing as cats, and if they could have got over those walls they would have been. No—there was no escape; nothing for it but to remain where they were, and the next morning be taken before magistrates. Ted was very miserable; all the more miserable that John for a long time was unconscious and speechless, and when he did speak it was in a rambling, incoherent manner, that was almost more distressing than his silence. Ted had never been so frightened in his life; he thought the night would never end, and at last, fairly worn out by fright and anxiety, he fell into a broken and restless sleep, from which he was awoke by the murmur of voices in the room outside.

He started up in affright. Were the police coming to take him as a burglar? He saw himself in imagination being dragged through the streets, and standing before the magistrates, and what on earth could he say in his defence? Only that he had been concerned in a very foolish trick, of which he was now thoroughly ashamed. It was broad daylight now; the sun was shining through the skylight upon John, as he lay on the ground looking flushed, and strange, and unconscious of all that was going on. Ted almost wished he was so too. Now it seemed as if the whole responsibility of the affair rested upon him. It would be no use people asking anything of

John; so they would be sure to ask him, and what ever should he say? In another moment the key was in the lock. Ted sprang to his feet; they would have him now for a certainty; then the door was opened, and a sharp-nosed, bright-eyed face peeped in; it was Mrs. Vesey's, who instantly, and with a scream, closed the door again.

"It's all up!" said Ted. "Now she'll send for the police—have us up before the magistrates; no doubt they'll be a set of muffs—they mostly are—and won't let me off with a wigging, or think that I've been served out enough as it is. There they are! a lot of women, I suppose, by the screeching. That's right; oh! I'm a murderer, am I? nearly killed old Simon? who's he, I wonder? Go on, pitch it strong; there's nothing like it while you're about it. Six of us, were there? Oh! I wonder who's been spreading all those precious lies."

The truth was, that one of the young ladies who worked for Mrs. Vesey was a niece of Mrs. Knight's, and had heard from her aunt that morning an exaggerated account of the invasion of the school the preceding night. Mrs. Knight, like Mrs. Bligh, had had no time to recognize the boys who had broken in and torn so wildly out again; and it is not to be wondered at if she magnified both their numbers and their size. The story lost nothing in her niece's mouth, and as soon as she came to the workroom that morning, she had related it to her companions and Mrs. Vesey. They all agreed that it was a great mercy the burglars had not paid them a visit, and Mrs. Vesey

felt especially thankful when she thought of the treasures in her own little apartment. It was very natural that when she opened the door and saw two miserable-looking objects—one stretched on the ground with an ugly cut on his forehead, the other pale, bruised, and haggard, standing by him, she should think that she had the burglars of the night before her. She closed the door, and hesitated a moment as to whether she should go into hysterics or run and tell what she had seen. Being a sensible woman, she took the latter course, and as the young ladies supplied the deficiencies in her narrative with interjections and reminiscences of the terrors of the night, Ted was able to hear the opinion they had formed of him; and it certainly was true, in his case, that listeners do not hear any good of themselves.

There is no knowing what turn affairs might have taken. Ted's worst fears might to some extent have been realized, had it not been for the unexpected appearance of Mrs. Bligh upon the scene. She was not in the habit of going to the school till eleven, but she intended to be there earlier that morning to consult with Mrs. Knight as to the best means of defending the school against similar attacks in future. Simon had not produced the galvanic-battery or the little engine the preceding evening, having some idea that they were a portable cooking apparatus, and thinking that they might be useful to him. Neither had he said that it was John Ashdell whom he had cudgelled so soundly. Simon thought that perhaps neither Mrs. Bligh

nor Mr. Ray would approve of his punishing one of their pupils so severely; therefore the lady still believed that some evil-disposed boys from the town had broken into the school, and thought that as the dressmaker's premises were as much unprotected as their own, it would be only neighborly to give her a caution in the matter on her way to the school. This was what brought her to the workroom this morning, and her presence at first only added to the tumult.

"Oh, Mrs. Bligh!"

"Oh, good gracious, Mrs. Bligh!"

"It's a mercy we're not all murdered!"

"But we shall be, if we don't mind what we're about!"

"They're desperate, and won't stand at anything!"

"You may rely upon it, they've both got revolvers!"

"So, if any one's to be shot, let it be the police!" said Mrs. Vesey, who was famous for making a tight bargain. "It's what they're paid for, and their duty to put up with."

Mrs. Bligh looked round her—cool, comfortable, and self-possessed as usual. That very look had a wonderful effect upon the commotion around; she raised her voice a little, and said, "Please, young ladies, let Mrs. Vesey speak, and then I may have a chance of hearing what is really wrong."

They were all quiet then, as Mrs. Bligh had expected they would be—as she would have told any one who might have remarked upon it, "If I couldn't manage a few girls at this time of day, I should like to know what I could do.'

Mrs. Vesey told her story. Two ruffians were in the other room; they must have got in through the skylight. She remembered, now, the cook, Martha, telling her she had seen some broken pieces of glass in the yard below. What had they better do?—what would Mrs. Bligh advise? She was too frightened herself to look at them.

"If they're no bigger than the ruffians I saw last night, I shouldn't mind looking," said Mrs. Bligh. "May I take a peep?"

There was a shivering, and a shrieking, and a huddling together, but one strong-minded young lady said she didn't mind going in with Mrs. Bligh if she might be allowed the tongs—perhaps Mrs. Bligh would like the poker? That lady, however, declined the weapon, and gently opening the door peeped in. She looked for one moment, then stepped into the room, and said to Mrs. Vesey, "I shall be glad if you will come too, but keep those girls out."

Mrs. Vesey hesitated, but her curiosity conquered her timidity. She went in, and Mrs. Bligh at once shut the door, and raised the head of the figure on the ground and placed it gently on her lap.

"Shall I send for a policeman?" gasped Mrs. Vesey.

"No, don't; send for a doctor—Mr. Sumner—"

"He may be dying, but he's dangerous for all that. Shall we have the girls in and handcuff them both?"

"No; don't; but tell one of them to get the poor fellows some tea."

"Oh, good gracious! how ever you can pity them?

Did you ever see such a young villain as that one looks?"

This was flattering to Ted, and he certainly was rather a contrast to his usual gentlemanly self.

"He'd be the better for some soap and water," said Mrs. Bligh, looking at him critically; "but I should like some vinegar to bathe this one's head with."

"I can't imagine how you can touch such low creatures," said Mrs. Vesey. "I never saw two such villanous faces in my life."

"Don't you know who they are?" said Mrs. Bligh "Then I'll tell you. It's Mr. Sumner's nephew and a young gentleman from London. They've been up to some nonsense, but we don't want to give them up to the police for all that. I think they're punished enough as it is; and if I were you, Mrs. Vesey, I'd keep this matter as quiet as I could."

If ever Ted felt grateful to any one in his life, he did at that moment to Mrs. Bligh. The sound of her hearty, cheery voice roused even poor John; and, looking up at her face as it beamed over him, he had a dim notion that he could suggest some way of doctoring himself, and said gently, "I've got an 'idea.'"

"Of course you have, my poor fellow," said Mrs. Bligh; "and it's to be hoped it isn't quite so nonsensical as the one, what ever it was, that led you into this scrape."

"But I won't say," said John, more gently still, that it's a correct one."

Mrs. Bligh looked up radiant. "He's broken his head!" she said, joyfully, "but he's let a little sense into it!"

So John had, apparently; and it was high time. His uncle came, he was taken home, and nursed and cared for. His mother came to attend him, for he was a long time ill; but at last he recovered, to be a wiser if a sadder boy. He had his "ideas" still, and a great many of them were really good ones; but he was ready to allow that other people might have good ideas too, and that all the sense in the world was not concentrated in John Ashdell. Ted, too, had a little of the conceit taken out of him, and he certainly had some to spare; and, on the whole, though the immediate consequences of that night's experiment were rather unpleasant ones, Mr. Sumner always considered that it had turned out very satisfactorily. I think he had some right to say so, and little cause to regret that he had asked his great-nephew to visit Woodhurst; for not an old doctor in the kingdom has a cleverer young partner, or more ready to make the best use of his own talents, more disposed to learn all that the wisdom of others can teach him, than has Mr. Sumner in his great-nephew, John Ashdell.

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